Myths and [mis] perceptions

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Mexico’s Two-Dimensional Foreign Policy

The 1960s are replete with clues for anyone seeking to understand Mexican foreign policy. During that decade, President Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964) reoriented Mexican diplomacy through a major but controlled opening to the outside, coinciding with changes that were under way in inter-American and international relations. The understanding between Mexico and the United States was subjected to unusual tensions, yet these did not damage the cordiality underlying the relationship. The most noteworthy feature of this period was that priorities on the bilateral agenda shifted, making more evident than before the two-dimensional, even schizoid, nature of Mexico’s relations with the rest of the world: independence and progressiveness on some matters, but conservatism and close alliance with Washington on others.

RELATIONS WITH CUBA

Observers who claim that Mexico’s foreign policy traditionally has been based on principles often point to the Mexican government’s decision to maintain relations with revolutionary Cuba and to support Cuba against the United States. Mexico’s fortitude on this issue is unquestioned, as is the importance of its stance for Fidel Castro’s Cuba. However, Mexico’s position was always a mutually agreed part of the country’s understanding with Washington. Explaining this seeming paradox will illuminate certain aspects of the relationship, as well as the dynamics of consciousness in the United States.

The Mexican government expressed its empathy with Cuba in many ways during the early days of that country’s revolution. On a
visit to Mexico in June 1960, Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós received “the warmest welcome in many years [for] a visiting head of state,” with crowds chanting “Cuba sí, Yankees no.” In July 1960, López Mateos declared that his government would veer to the “extreme left within constitutional limits,” a statement whose meaning was very clear given the hemispheric context. That same month, Emilio Sánchez Piedra, president of the Permanent Commission of the Mexican Congress, stated that Mexico was squarely “on Cuba’s side” in the growing confrontation between the United States and Cuba (Pellicer 1972; NYT, June 10 and July 8, 10, 13, 1960; Apr. 19, 1961).

As relations between Cuba and the United States deteriorated, Sánchez Piedra went on the warpath, declaring in September 1960 that “the Cuban people are engaged in a revolution to free themselves from foreign influences, such as Nazism, Fascism, and Franco-ism.” His statement particularly annoyed a parliamentary delegation from the United States, which suspected that Sánchez was implying that the foreign influence in the Cuban case was the United States. Even the slightest such hint infuriated the Americans because, as emphatically reported in the Times, “all freedom-loving people [know], of course, that this is not true” (NYT, Sept. 16, 1960). In 1962, Mexico’s ambassador to the Organization of American States, Vicente Sánchez Gavito, declared that the Americans were guided by a cowboy movie psychology, in which the fair-haired protagonist is “the good guy,” and all the evil deeds are attributable to foreigners (NYT, June 9, 1962).

Mexico’s decision to maintain relations with Cuba riled public opinion in the United States. Between 1959 and 1970, the variable for opinions on Mexico’s relationship with Cuba had 28 negative references in the Times, against a single positive one. Interestingly, neither the Mexican declarations nor the U.S. responses merited more than brief articles in the paper’s inner pages. Given U.S. belligerence toward Cuba, why did the Times consider the relationship between Mexico and Cuba to be of such little importance, and why did Washington tolerate the friendliness between these two nations? Although the United States was vexed by Mexico’s statements and actions, except for a brief period in the late 1970s the United States was not unduly concerned, because Mexican policies were not considered to be a threat to the security of the United States. (This key aspect of the relationship’s internal mechanisms is examined in greater detail in the following chapter.)

During the Cuban Revolution’s early years, Washington was certainly concerned regarding its possible effects on Mexican stability. James Reston went so far as to suggest that “Mexico, and not Cuba, is undoubtedly the main objective of Communist activity in the Hemisphere.” Although Mexico was at peace, its “immense problems”
(which were only then being acknowledged) might threaten its precious stability (Reston 1962). This concern was transitory, and the United States soon formulated a different interpretation: that the aim of Mexico’s policy toward Cuba was not to harass or annoy the United States; it was to appease the Mexican Left. Mexico’s progressive foreign policies were, in fact, an aid in maintaining the country’s established authoritarian order.

The United States would refer frequently to this nexus between stability and diplomacy. In a 1962 memorandum, Ambassador Thomas Mann pondered why Mexico adopted such apparently incomprehensible policies and attitudes. He then stated that in his “attempts to analyze the sometimes unexplainable policies of the Mexican government,” he had “concluded that the ‘international and national’ actions of the government were based on the overriding objective of holding the PRI together” (DOS 1962a: 1). According to a State Department document, “the policy of the Mexican government, on both the Cuban and Dominican issues [was intended to erode Mexican] leftist propaganda on these issues” (DOS 1965a: 3; see also CIA 1964: 3–4). These ideas informed U.S. policy toward Mexico as expressed in an internal White House communiqué from 1961: “we should not demand that Mexico take an out-and-out United States line on Cuba [because Mexico’s] political stability is worth preserving in a world of ferment” (NYT, Dec. 2, 1964).

THE FACTS OF MEXICO’S CUBA POLICY

The U.S. elite had good reason to be at ease regarding Mexico’s foreign policy. Extensive evidence confirms that the Mexican leadership frequently disavowed in private the radicalism it espoused in public. On February 18, 1959, weeks after Castro’s entrance into Havana, Presidents Eisenhower and López Mateos met in Acapulco. In his memoirs, Eisenhower recalled the “spirit of friendship” that prevailed at the meeting, as well as his satisfaction when

López Mateos suggested to me that we maintain the relationship, using my brother Milton as a traveling intermediary. This agreement proved very useful. When “Project Mercury” [the United States’ man-in-space program] required a control station in Guaymas, Mexico, for its success, my brother carried out the delicate negotiations with President López Mateos. In the end, we obtained total Mexican cooperation (Eisenhower 1965: 344).

Around August 1960, the State Department was informed, “through informal channels, that Mexico feared Communist influence
in Cuba more than did the United States” (NYT, Aug. 14, 1960). Regarding Sánchez Piedra’s declarations, the Times noted, just one day after these statements were made, that visiting U.S. representatives received an “unusually warm welcome” from López Mateos. Moreover, the U.S. contingent at the parade commemorating Mexican Independence received a “warm ovation”; Washington declared itself to be “completely satisfied” (NYT, Sept. 18, 1960). And finally, Manuel Moreno Sánchez and Minister Manuel Tello reassured officials from the U.S. embassy that Sánchez Gavito’s statements to the OAS were no more than “personal opinions” (NYT, July 10, 1960).

In November 1964, a month before being sworn in as president, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz stated—in a private conversation with Lyndon Johnson—that the United States could “rest assured that, in the moment of truth, Mexico will unequivocally be on the American side.” He added that “there will be a considerable advantage [for both nations] if Mexico is able to continue demonstrating its political independence, disagreeing with the United States on relatively minor affairs.” Although this might entail “temporary tensions, it will also prove that the United States of America is in favor of independence” (DOS 1964a).

Mexico’s actions accorded with such statements. During the U.S. invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, Mexican authorities maintained a low profile; the only prominent member of the ruling elite to speak out in Cuba’s favor was former president Lázaro Cárdenas (NYT, Oct. 28, 1962). The government, carefully distancing itself from Cárdenas’s position, tightened controls over what was published in Mexico regarding Cuba. By July 5, 1961, the Times was able to suggest that López Mateos had shifted “from the left toward a middle-of-the-road policy.”

President John Kennedy’s visit to Mexico in July 1962 confirmed the sincerity of Mexico’s expressions of goodwill. The Times rated the event as a total success (figures 55–57). Approximately one million Mexicans accorded Kennedy a “tumultuous reception,” thought to be “the largest and most enthusiastic ever given to a visiting chief of state in Mexico’s history.” It may not have been the largest, but it almost certainly equaled Truman’s welcome in 1947 and far exceeded the recent welcome for the Cuban president. According to the Times, the most widely accepted explanation for this rapturous welcome was that President and Mrs. Kennedy had “captured the imagination of the Mexicans” (NYT, June 30, 1962; 1962a). (While the Kennedys’ charisma was undeniable, one must remember that enthusiastic throngs to welcome foreign dignitaries rarely gather spontaneously in Mexico. Such multitudes have traditionally been one of the instruments that the ruling elite employs in order to earn the goodwill of visiting notables.)
Kennedy appreciated Mexico’s warm welcome, especially since it came close on the heels of his failed invasion of Cuba, which Kennedy himself called the “worst defeat of his career” (Wyden 1979: 310). He reciprocated in the usual manner, with lofty speeches reflecting the attitudes in vogue in Washington and with the traditional loan. Kennedy stated that the Mexican Revolution was a model to be emulated, and he acknowledged that government should play “an essential role in stimulating and supplementing the efforts of private enterprise” (NYT 1962b). However, this encounter, like most presidential summits, merits only a passing reference in the history of the Kennedy administration. Mexico was, after all, a low priority for the Kennedy White House.¹

Nonetheless, the United States was pleased with the demonstrations of Mexican support. During Kennedy’s visit, for example, López Mateos first expressed support for the Alliance for Progress. “The terms of his approval,” according to a Times editorial, “were sound and encouraging.” Of course, López Mateos also took advantage of the occasion to reaffirm that Mexico would pursue an independent policy direction and that it would maintain its relations with Cuba (NYT, July 1, 1962). That a Mexican president felt free to deviate publicly from Washington’s view on so delicate a matter confirms that on this issue Mexico and the United States had “agreed to disagree” (NYT, Oct. 28, 1962).

Despite this divergence, Mexico stood squarely behind the United States throughout the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. The Mexican government firmly supported “President Kennedy’s determination to dislodge Soviet missile bases from Cuba”; the missile bases were considered to be “a threat to the peace and security of the Hemisphere” (NYT, Oct. 21, 1962). Although López Mateos was in the Philippines at the time, he declared—employing a prudent euphemism—that “Mexico would stand by the Organization of American States in meeting the Cuban situation” (NYT, Oct. 23, 1962). Some months later, in Punta del Este, Uruguay, Mexico’s minister of foreign affairs, Manuel Tello, was more direct, attacking “the regime of Premier Fidel Castro” and stating that Cuba’s actions were “totally divorced from the policies which have been the common denominator of institutions of all peoples of the New World” (NYT, Jan. 25, 1963).

By 1964, this combination of private reassurances and overt backing at key moments led the CIA to conclude that “Mexico will probably pursue its brand of ‘independent’ foreign policy on issues such as Cuba, disarmament, and international trade, which at times will be at odds with those of the United States.” Even so, there was no need for

¹Kennedy’s untimely death precluded any memoirs. A closely equivalent source is the text by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1965: 768).
concern: the Mexican government was "at heart pro-Western, friendly toward the United States, and fully aware that its economic and political interests are closely tied to this country" (CIA 1964: 152). Thus, despite the dynamics surrounding the Cuban Revolution, Washington was able to corroborate once again that in critical situations Mexico would always stand as an ally (see, for example, NYT, Nov. 18, 1962; Apr. 8, 1963; Sept. 2, 1963).

Because the appearance of cooperation with the United States conflicted with "Mexican nationalism," mechanisms were set in motion to shore up the Mexican government's image. One was the two governments' "agreement to disagree," which was open to any number of interpretations. It led many Mexicans to believe that their country differed with the United States on matters of substance, while in truth the disagreements were over issues of secondary importance. The White House tolerated Mexico's pronouncements, because it recognized that these statements helped the Mexican government to maintain stability, preempt the opposition on the Left, and curb Cuba's revolutionaries who, in exchange for Mexico's support in the international arena, refrained from intervening in Mexican affairs.

Both at its core and on the surface, the U.S.-Mexico relationship was still regulated by the informal understanding reached during the 1920s. The Mexican government continued to invoke principles as the basis of its policy decisions and often was at odds with Washington. In certain crucial areas, however, it never overstepped the boundaries that the United States marked out to protect its interests, even when these boundaries shifted in line with changes in the U.S. worldview.

No evidence has yet come to light that the two governments ever explicitly discussed or agreed to the rules of this understanding. Based on available documents, interviews with government officials from both nations, and actions taken by the two governments, one can deduce that the understanding is implemented on a case-by-case basis, and that it has proved flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. It has remained in force because it brings continuing benefits to both governments. The United States has benefited from having a stable, supportive neighbor, and Mexico has gained maneuvering space for its experiment in self-determination and the latitude for maintaining a vise-like grip on society.2

One probably inevitable consequence was that the U.S. elite sometimes failed to take seriously the independence of Mexico's foreign policy. Carl Sulzberger, a member of the family that owns the Times, penned a column in which he stated that, had the Bay of Pigs invasion succeeded, Mexico would likely have felt "a wave of simulated in-

2The problems that would later plague the Mexican economic model would transform all of this.
dignation, accompanied by vast relief” (Sulzberger 1961). This view is seconded by Daniel James, who noted that if American troops had invaded Cuba, Mexico’s official reaction would have been to denounce the action, but only for about a week, after which time the Mexicans would have “applauded [the United States] for being macho” (James 1963). And, according to a Times editorial: “many Mexican politicians of recent decades have managed to accumulate fortunes; they are men of substance who talk revolution, but do not practice it or encourage it, either at home or in Cuba” (NYT 1964b).

It is certainly true that many Mexican government officials firmly believed that Mexico’s defense of a sovereign foreign policy, based on principle and under constant siege from the United States, was a noble and patriotic pursuit. Unfortunately, both for these officials and for Mexico, the facts indicate that all pivotal foreign policy decisions were made in Los Pinos (the president’s residence) and in the Ministry of Government, and were guided by crassly pragmatic considerations, the uppermost being to keep the ruling elite in power. Principles, though frequently invoked, were rarely a factor in fact.³

**CHINA, TITO, AND DE GAULLE**

There are many aspects of Adolfo López Mateos’s intense international activities that confirm the arguments outlined above, including the establishment of trade relations between Mexico and the People’s Republic of China and state visits to Mexico by Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia and President Charles de Gaulle of France.

The triumph of Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists in October 1949 and the creation of the People’s Republic of China distressed conservative sectors in the United States. A campaign to castigate those responsible for having “lost China” was soon under way. By the 1960s, feelings had cooled somewhat, although there was still opposition to the idea of normalized relations between Mexico and the People’s Republic. When a Chinese exhibition hall was established in Mexico, the Times called it a “propaganda center” (NYT, Nov. 17, 1963). Although the State Department quietly acquiesced to “expanded Mexican trade in nonstrategic commodities with the China mainland,” it emphasized the need to “urge the Mexican gov-

³Interestingly, such pragmatism finds a parallel in the strategy of the Cuban revolutionaries vis-à-vis Mexico. Their top priority was always to preserve an image of affinity with the Mexican government, and to this end they turned a blind eye to the regime’s authoritarian nature. Paradoxically, over recent decades the most consistent point of agreement between Washington and Havana has been their shared indifference regarding Mexico’s internal affairs and their tolerance of its authoritarian government.
ernment to insist on strict reciprocity" in the number of commercial
attachés exchanged (DOS 1964b: 2-3). This example of U.S. flexibility
toward Mexico’s independent stand was largely due to an expanding
potential consciousness: as the United States’ worries eased, China
and Communism were perceived with greater objectivity and less
paranoia.

In 1963, Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito traveled to Mexico, where
he received a “warm, at times tumultuous welcome” (approximately
750,000 people turned out to greet him) (NYT, Oct. 5, 1963). Bearing
in mind Mexico City’s recent welcome for President Kennedy, one
cannot but marvel at the regime’s capacity for mobilization. It is hard
to imagine that the city’s inhabitants could be genuinely gripped by
sudden enthusiasm for such dissimilar heads of state. Washington
was not unduly concerned by Tito’s visit because, as noted in a State
Department memorandum, the United States did not “regard the
presence of Tito’s representatives and missions as a threat comparable
to that presented by other Communist regimes” (DOS 1962a: 3), re­
flecting an increasingly relaxed attitude with which certain U.S. sec­
tors viewed Communism.

In 1964, however, serious concerns did arise in Washington,
brought on by the visit to Mexico of a U.S. ally, President Charles de
Gaulle. This event produced 4 negative references to Mexico’s foreign
policy in the Times, more than any other visit by a foreign head of
state (figure 46). De Gaulle’s visit was considered a threat because he
“represented a policy of independence . . . an old dream for Mexico
and many other Latin Americans” (NYT, Mar. 15, 1964). When the
visit was announced, the Times editorialized that the United States
would perceive it as a “challenge,” although a limited one, because,
“just like the Communist bloc, the West has never ceased to be uni­
fied” (NYT 1964c). In fact, both the Times and Washington had under­
estimated the importance that Mexico attached to de Gaulle’s visit.
The climax came when the French president addressed an audience of
some 225,000 people from the balcony of the National Palace. De
Gaulle was the first, and still the only, visiting head of state to have
been granted the use of this highly symbolic space (NYT, Mar. 17,
1964). Furthermore, all living former presidents of Mexico attended
the banquet hosted in his honor, a tribute not extended to President
Kennedy (DOS 1964c). Such signs of esteem expressed Mexico’s
dreams of becoming a midsized power with broad margins of auton­
omy, very much in the mold of de Gaulle’s France.

Washington reacted like a spurned mentor, jealous with the reali­
zation that a devoted and submissive pupil had in fact a will of his
own and could potentially change allegiance. After de Gaulle visited
Mexico’s National Autonomous University, correspondent Paul Ken­
nedy noted that “there was not even a small demonstration,” even
though the university was "known as a center for demonstrations over remote as well as immediate causes" (NYT, Mar. 19, 1964). Commenting on the throngs that welcomed de Gaulle, the U.S. correspondent stated that the crowd "did not approach in size or enthusiasm the reception for President and Mrs. Kennedy in 1962" (NYT, Mar. 17, 1964).

The United States' jealousy was expressed more explicitly in private. A U.S. diplomat's report to Washington deplored the Mexican tradition of carting crowds of people downtown to applaud and wave, adding that de Gaulle's reception lacked the "spontaneity" of the Kennedy welcome (DOS 1964c: 1). These observations on the custom of hauling impoverished Mexicans to public events were intended to minimize the attentions paid to de Gaulle; no official document made note of the fact that the welcomes for American dignitaries were orchestrated in the very same way. Consciousness can be selective.

Both the French and the Mexicans came to realize that the visit had upset Washington. Toward the end of de Gaulle's sojourn in Mexico, they tried to "dispel the persistent feeling that the de Gaulle visit [was a] challenge to the United States' supremacy in Mexico, and in all Latin America" (NYT, Mar. 15, 1964). A confidential State Department report reached a similar conclusion (DOS 1964d). A corollary came from James Reston, who called the visit "symbolic" and suggested that it had been "a pleasant ceremonial success, but . . . a side show" (1964).

In brief, the independent diplomacy of López Mateos was no more than a minor irritant in Washington and had little effect on the cordiality of the bilateral relationship. Meanwhile, it contributed to Mexico's stability, satisfied nationalist and leftist sectors, and enhanced the nation's prestige in an international community that was willing seemingly to ignore the absence of democracy in Mexico and the country's long list of human rights violations.

López Mateos's successor, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970), narrowed the government's focus to Mexico's domestic problems and its relationship with the United States, rather than trying to diversify Mexico's relations in the international arena. The discourse of international independence would not resume until 1970, when Luis Echeverría once again sought to pursue the old dream of Mexico as a widely involved and active player on the world stage.

CLOSE, CORDIAL RELATIONS BREED NEW PROBLEMS

Cordial relations between Mexico and the United States continued throughout most of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's six-year term. It was Díaz
Ordaz who ratified the understanding for mutual support with Lyndon Johnson in November 1964. Throughout the 1960s, the "general overview of the relationship" variable garnered 122 positive and only 10 negative references (figures 48–49). However, by the end of the decade problems began to surface as priorities shifted on the bilateral agenda. Issues that receded in importance include the oil industry (which had 81 mentions between 1946 and 1959, and only 6 during the 1960s) and military relations (78 references during the first period, 18 during the second). Variables that acquired a higher priority were border relations and drug trafficking, and these two were beginning to meld into a single concern. The former had 46 references from 1946 to 1959, rising to 149 during the 1960s; references to drugs rose from 10 to 41 over the same period (figures 58–66).

The continuing cordiality can be attributed to events such as Lyndon Johnson’s trip to Mexico in April 1966. His visit came at an important moment; Johnson had recently ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic, and the United States was rocked by protests against the war in Vietnam. Johnson’s visit, initially intended to be purely ceremonial, ended up providing Johnson with tangible benefits. The U.S. president—who hoped to demonstrate his “concern for Latin America without undertaking a trip to a country where his reception might be cool or even hostile”—chose Mexico for a “brief and informal” visit and met with a “popular welcome as great as was possible on such short notice” (NYT, Apr. 16, 1966). Although Mexican officials condemned the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, this did not preclude them from showering Johnson with hospitality. The “wild, surging, and genuinely affectionate welcome [was] like a spring tonic for Johnson,” who considered this the warmest reception he had ever been accorded (NYT, Apr. 16, 1966). His press secretary told a journalist, “to suggest that Johnson was pleased” fell far short of the mark (NYT 1966a). A year later, Johnson still fondly recalled “his triumphant visit” (NYT, May 12, 1967). While in Mexico, LBJ posed two rhetorical questions: “Who said we could not go to Latin America? Who said the Dominican Republic disgraced us?” (NYT, Apr. 16, 1966). At the end of the day, it was the Dominicans who were disgraced, not the Americans.

According to Times editorials, LBJ’s trip had been “a great success.” Johnson received an “affectionate and gracious welcome by Latin America’s most prosperous nation” (NYT 1966a). Media coverage was overwhelmingly positive (figures 54–57). An internal document from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico emphasized the “enthusiastic welcome accorded to the President” (DOS 1966a). The encounter’s

4Despite his cordial reception, Johnson spared little thought to this visit in his memoirs (1971: 348). Most American presidents seem to have taken Mexican hospitality for granted.
success was due in no small measure to the two presidents' decision, documented in the minutes of their meeting, to make no reference to Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or the Organization of American States (DOS 1966b).

Johnson showed his gratitude in two ways. First, he delivered a bouquet of political rhetoric, describing Mexico as "great" and "beautiful" (NYT, Apr. 16, 1966). Second, he announced a loan, the traditional follow-on to a reasonably successful summit. On this occasion, it was a loan from EXIMBANK to PEMEX which, incidentally, broke a long-standing Washington taboo against loans to nationalized oil companies (DOS 1966b).

The warmth of the relationship facilitated the United States' decision to return to Mexico a small strip of territory, "El Chamizal," that Mexico had lost when the Rio Grande changed its course early in the century. The Times had argued in 1963 that it was time to correct "the error" the United States had made when it decided to ignore an international arbitration award in 1911 that granted the area to Mexico (NYT 1963c). Kennedy and López Mateos had hoped to settle this matter, but it was Johnson and Díaz Ordaz who came up with a final resolution in 1967 (NYT, Feb. 20, 1963; Oct. 28, 1967). Of course, the two national media interpreted the settlement differently. The Mexican media reported that El Chamizal was recovered thanks to the efforts of the Mexican government, the inherent validity of Mexico's claim, and the firmness of the nation's principles. The Times, however, stated that the agreements on El Chamizal and on a scheme "to control the salinity of the Colorado River water . . . were made possible by American concessions" (NYT 1965).

The meeting between Johnson and Díaz Ordaz in 1967 was the final event in an era of extraordinarily untroubled relations and friendly presidential summits between the two nations. For different reasons, both nations were soon engulfed by internal turmoil. In 1968, bowing to widespread protests over his escalation of the U.S. presence in Vietnam, Johnson opted not to run for a second term in office. The Mexican government, meanwhile, was facing a host of problems that stemmed from its bloody repression of the democratic student movement at Tlatelolco in 1968. These internal conflicts were soon exacerbated by tensions in the bilateral relationship. In 1969, the U.S. government carried out "Operation Intercept" to halt drug trafficking in Mexico, in the process demonstrating some of the less obvious aspects of the prevailing relationship of domination.

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1 He managed to weave the term "great" into his brief speech no fewer than eleven times.
DRUGS, NATIONALISM, AND RELATIONSHIPS OF DOMINATION

The illegal drug trade erupted suddenly and violently in 1969. This phenomenon had the potential to affect the security of both nations as well as the bilateral relationship as a whole. The drug trade provides a good window on the nature of the United States' worldview, confirms the weak and malleable nature of Mexico's official nationalism, and reflects the role and importance of coercion among the mechanisms that dictate the relationship of domination between Mexico and the United States. It also illuminates a perverse facet of the relationship: Washington sometimes overlooked or downplayed the narco-trafficking problem so as not to annoy the Mexican government.

There were three peaks in the Times's interest in drug trafficking within the Mexico-U.S. relationship: 1969-1970, 1976-1977, and 1985-1986 (figures 65-66). Also noteworthy was the rapid and intense fluctuation between positive and negative references. There were 12 negative references in 1969, and no positive ones. Only a year later, there were 10 positive and 2 negative. The two interrelated aspects to the problem of drug trafficking go far toward explaining these fluctuations in interest. The first is the enormous demand for narcotics within the United States, and the second is Mexico's demonstrated proficiency as a narcotics producer and middleman.

Narcotics production and distribution had become firmly established in Mexico long before the 1960s crisis, but Mexico's role in the drug trade had not previously been a cause for concern in Washington. In 1952, for example, the CIA noted that Colonel Antonio Serrano—one of President Alemán's closest advisers and the founder of the powerful Federal Security Directorate—"tolerates, and in fact carries out, illegal activities such as the smuggling of narcotics" (CIA 1951: 58). Although Washington was certainly aware of Serrano's involvement, this was not considered important. A former regional director for the Drug Enforcement Agency, Edward Allen Heath, acknowledged in 1981 that the United States "ignored the growing problem in Mexico, and seriously underestimated this nation's potential as a heroin producer" (Heath 1981: 4).

During the 1960s, however, this attitude—and the policies associated with it—changed, as the U.S. government began to hold the drug-producing nations responsible for the country's drug problem and posited that they should collaborate, by choice or by force, with the United States in finding a solution. In 1962, the sheriff of Yuma, Arizona, testified before Congress that there was a growing traffic in drugs cultivated by "ignorant Indians and Mexican farmers," and that this activity was being "financed, organized and directed by a small group of wealthy, intelligent, ruthless and dangerous Mexicans" (NYT, May 10, 1962). This testimony foreshadows what would
become the central thesis in the United States until the mid-1980s: the problems caused by drug use and the drug trade within the United States resulted directly from the existence of an available supply, and the point of supply was where these problems should be solved.

These ideas were congruent with one of the fundamental underpinnings of Americans' worldview: because they believed in their own exceptional character, the responsibility for drug consumption must perforce lie with those who produced and sold narcotics. However, this view eventually evolved, and Americans came to acknowledge the importance of demand and to accept that drug users were part of the problem, although it took years for the United States to own up to its share of responsibility. During the 1960s marijuana and heroin trafficking increased in Mexico (although Mexico had not yet become a major transit corridor for South American cocaine), and the United States predictably laid the blame on Mexico. In August 1969, the Pentagon declared Tijuana off limits for all U.S. military personnel, in a two-pronged strategy designed to stop the troops from buying drugs and to pressure the Mexican government to take stronger steps against drug trafficking (NYT, Aug. 29, Sept. 6, 1969).

During a presidential summit in September 1969, Nixon informed Díaz Ordaz that his administration intended to do something about the drug problem (NYT, Sept. 9, 1969). Almost simultaneously, a special task force created by Nixon concluded that "the fundamental responsibility for the eradication of production and processing of opium and marijuana in Mexico" should be borne by the Mexican government and its enforcement agencies, and that "nothing should be done to lift this responsibility from it" (WH 1969). Later that month, without informing or consulting the Mexican government, Washington set "Operation Intercept" in motion, enforcing a detailed security check on every person and vehicle entering the United States from Mexico. At least for the period covered in this study, this was the first occasion on which the United States used coercion so openly and so forcefully.

Operation Intercept was in fact intended to apply "limited economic sanctions against Mexico" and to pressure the Mexican government to cooperate more fully in the war on drugs. Its success was undeniable, as trade and tourism ground "slowly to a halt" (NYT, Sept. 25, 1969). A U.S. Customs supervisor neatly summed up Washington's opinion: "Mexico was paying dearly for its failure this far to move against major marijuana suppliers." This individual went on to add that, in his nation's view, drug-related graft and corruption among Mexico's "police and politicians becomes United States business." Further, if Mexico refused to cooperate, Phase 2 of Operation Intercept would go into effect, in which Washington would publish "the names of about 20 Mexican major offenders" (NYT, Oct. 2, 1969).
Some sectors within the American elite opposed Washington's coercive measures. The *Times*, for example, was of the opinion that "from every conceivable standpoint [Operation Intercept was a] massive political blunder" [and further reduced] the Nixon Administration's meager store of political capital with the rest of Latin America." Coercive strategies attracted criticism primarily because they only addressed domestic concerns within the United States and ignored all international implications. According to the *Times*, Operation Intercept's true mission was to fulfill "in spectacular fashion the President's campaign promise on the 'law-and-order' theme" (NYT, Sept. 30, 1969; 1969a, 1969b).

Mexican authorities reacted with extraordinary (rhetorical) energy. An indignant Díaz Ordaz stated that Washington's actions "had raised a wall of suspicion in Mexico's relations with the United States" (NYT, Sept. 30, 1969). Mexican government officials, who preferred to remain anonymous, pointed out that Operation Intercept reinforced "the characterization of Mexico as the source of the U.S. drug problem" (NYT, Oct. 5, 1969), while in Mexico the opposite view has always prevailed: Mexico's problems with drug traffickers are driven virtually in their entirety by U.S. demand.

The United States was also criticized for trying to force third parties to adopt the policies that Washington wanted to see deployed against the illegal drug trade. For example, Washington wanted Mexico to bombard its fields of marijuana and opium poppies with chemical products (NYT, Oct. 3, 1969). Mexican authorities were disturbed by the unilateral nature of the U.S. policies, continuing the "old story of United States policy decisions that affect a Latin American country profoundly being taken for domestic political reasons without consultations or consideration" (NYT, Oct. 8, 1969). One element of Mexico's response was "Operation Dignity," organized by Francisco Cano Escalante, then head of the Federation of National Chambers of Commerce (CONCANACO). Operation Dignity proposed a Mexican boycott of U.S. commodities; it was openly supported by the president of Mexico (author interview with Cano Escalante, February 1996).

The two governments soon began to negotiate. In a "dramatic overnight reversal of opinion," Washington suspended Operation Intercept and shelved its threat to disclose the names of major Mexican offenders (NYT, Oct. 11, 1969). In return, Mexico signed several anti-narcotics accords with the United States, which were presented to public opinion as "Operation Cooperate." According to a *Times* editorial, "Mexico promised to intensify its campaign against the production and exportation of narcotics" (NYT 1970a).

Mexico was forced to accept greater DEA involvement in its domestic anti-drug campaign. It agreed to spray marijuana and opium
plantations, and to intensify activities against producers, dealers, and users. A "permanent campaign" against drugs was established, which relied heavily on Mexico's internal security forces, including the army (Treverton 1988: 214). (It is worth noting that the U.S. armed forces refused for decades to participate in the war on drugs.)

In effect, the Mexican government was forced to acquiesce to the will of the United States. This interpretation is confirmed in the memoirs of G. Gordon Liddy, one of the individuals responsible for the new operation (and later jailed for his role in the Watergate affair). Liddy states that the operation was "intended to bend Mexico to our will. We figured Mexico could hold out for a month; in fact, they caved in after two weeks, and we got what we wanted." He also noted that it was an "exercise in international extortion, pure and simple and effective" (Del Villar 1988: 200). Washington confirmed the effectiveness of coercion: in 1970 Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson declared that "the greatest success so far in [the United States'] bilateral efforts [to halt the flow of drugs] has been with Mexico" (NYT, Apr. 3, 1970).

Even a glimpse at the issue of drug trafficking reveals that coercion is an important element in Mexico–U.S. relations and that the general design of Mexico's anti-narcotics policy is decided in Washington. In return, the United States has done much to help perpetuate the impression that Mexico's foreign policy is guided by principles.