

CENTRAL AMERICA

Mexico on 'enemies list' in U.S. regional showdown drive

by Tim Rush

Americans have become so inured to continuing declines in U.S.-Mexico relations that further deterioration is met almost with a shrug of the shoulders.

Yet current U.S. policy toward Mexico is on the threshold of a qualitative change, a change toward *strategic* confrontation which promises to make the days of James Schlesinger's sabotage of U.S.-Mexico relations over the natural gas issue look like a period of exemplary neighborliness by comparison.

In the past week:

- Mexico's Interior Minister, Enrique Olivares Santana, called in U.S. Ambassador Julian Nava for a special audience to convey Mexico's extreme displeasure with recent U.S. policy pronouncements;
- Several political parties called for Nava's ouster from the country. The semi-official daily *El Nacional* concluded a scathing editorial by suggesting that Nava "would be better off keeping his mouth closed" since "his diplomatic talents are not noticeable."
- A top-ranking military figure urged that the military begin serious preparations for defense of the oil fields from foreign aggression.

The heart of this rapidly maturing crisis is Washington's decision to gun for immediate confrontation with the Soviet Union over Cuba. This is the regional corollary of the PD 59 limited nuclear war doctrine, and it involves a chain of options leading from use of Rapid Deployment Forces up to "tactical nuclear weapons."

To carry off such a confrontation, the U.S. must isolate Cuba from its hemispheric neighbors. Just as such isolation seemed to be gaining force around the incidents leading to the exodus of Cuban refugees last spring, however, Mexican President López Portillo announced that he would visit Cuba during the summer. And when he arrived at the beginning of August, he made the strongest-ever pledge of Mexican support for Cuban sovereignty and independence. This continued Mexico's traditional policy of friendship, which in the early 1960s led it to be the only country in the hemisphere to maintain trade ties with the island during the U.S.-led embargo.

Enraged Washington policymakers have responded

with a series of public and private demands that Mexico line up behind Washington confrontation tactics or be viewed as a direct adversary of the same class as Cuba.

The place where Washington hopes to force the issue is Central America, specifically El Salvador. Washington has told Mexico that it must declare one way or the other—with the left opposition in the country or with the Washington-backed junta.

The Carter strategy is identical to the policy of Reagan's advisers, who appear to differ only in asserting that they should have the privilege of carrying it out themselves rather than the "bumblers" in Carter's camp.

Three elements

The immediate issues in recent tensions were summed up by a top State Department official: "There seem to be three strands in there and they're all woven together—the *Heraldo* coverage of LaRouche, the *Excelsior* document, and in between, Nava's statements."

To most Americans, the official's statement will come as a complete mystery. In a clampdown on information reminiscent of a wartime blackout, the major U.S. media covered none of these stories or Mexico's angry response. (See accompanying chronology.)

But the three incidents converge to sketch a devastating map of the strategic conflict already brewing.

Starting Aug. 11, a major Mexican newspaper, *El Herald*, began sustained coverage of charges made by *EIR*'s founder and contributing editor, former Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, that Brzezinski's policy is to "Iranize" Mexico in order to sabotage its industrialization efforts and ultimately seize control of its oil resources. In a clumsy effort to deflect the impact, the American embassy violated U.S. law and sent the newspaper involved unsolicited and libelous materials concerning LaRouche.

Four days later, upon returning to Mexico from the Democratic National Convention, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Julian Nava called a press conference to demand that Mexico "clarify" its policy of friendship toward Cuba. This set off a furor in Mexican official

and press circles. A week later, Nava compounded the provocation by telling a Lions Club meeting that Mexico is "a battleground of the world's great powers."

Then, on Aug. 25, the daily newspaper *Excelsior* published a banner front-page story reporting the existence of a National Security Council (NSC) memorandum on U.S.-Mexico relations. According to *Excelsior*, the memorandum states that if Mexico does not accede to U.S. hemispheric policy, Mexico will be treated as an "irresponsible power" acting contrary to U.S. national security interests. "Mexico's distancing itself from formerly common positions with the U.S. has been most evident in its international policy with regard to the Caribbean and Central America," *Excelsior* cited the memorandum as asserting.

Despite official denials from the State Department and NSC that such a document exists, the sections quoted by *Excelsior* cohere too closely with visible U.S. policy to allow Washington's disclaimers much weight.

The NSC memorandum as excerpted by *Excelsior* recommends that "the concern and general confusion in certain policy circles in the U.S. regarding the apparent official policy of the Mexican government toward U.S.-Cuban bilateral relations be communicated to President López Portillo," together with a request for an "opportune clarification of Mexico's position." The document reportedly further notes Mexico's "fear that the crisis in that region [Caribbean and Central America] could turn it into a battleground of the major ideological forces in the world."

The language is precisely that of Nava, a nervous greenhorn ambassador apparently following script down to the letter.

A month before, NSC Mexico staffer Timothy Deal had told a meeting of the U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce in Washington that the signals from Mexico concerning its Central America policy "were not clear." Referring to Nicaragua, Washington wanted to know if official Mexican policy was to back further Sandinista-style uprisings, or join U.S.-backed center-right forces, he stated.

In an interview with *EIR* this week, Deal confirmed that "the most important thing is what Mexico will do in Central America. We are watching carefully. We do see the situation differently from them."

'Intervene in a drastic way'

The Reagan policy advisers' version of the same doctrine was spelled out in, among other locations, the Summer 1980 issue of *Washington Quarterly*, the magazine of the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). James Theberge and Roger Fontaine, both past directors of the CSIS Latin America division, are two of the principal Reagan

policy-makers on Latin America. Fontaine left the Center only two weeks ago.

A lead article in the Center's quarterly, authored by private consultant and reputed former CIA stringer Daniel James, charges that Mexico's policy toward the U.S. has shifted 180 degrees under López Portillo. Mexico is "aggressively moving to extend its influence into the Caribbean and Central America." Mexican involvement on the side of leftist forces could provide decisive impetus to a "revolutionary hurricane" offering "an irresistible temptation to the Soviets and their Cuban satellite." In such a case, to maintain the Caribbean as an "American Mediterranean," the United States would have no alternative but to "intervene in a drastic form."

Carter and Reagan strategists alike are well aware that "hard-line" U.S. postures only help local insurgents to speed up possible Mexican radicalization along these lines. The inference is clear that, as in Iran, the State Department is willing to deliberately foment anti-American movements if the ensuing internal breakdown appears strategically advantageous.

Mexican response

Statements by senior Mexican officials reflect an acute awareness that U.S. policy under either a Carter or Reagan indeed lead toward such a "drastic intervention." Rear Admiral Fourzan Márquez, speaking alongside López Portillo Aug. 23 in a statement widely assumed to have been personally cleared by the President, declared that Mexico's historical commitment to a foreign policy of strict nonintervention was no longer sufficient to guarantee Mexican security. He called for stronger military preparedness to meet any "internal or external acts carried out against our interests," and added the striking suggestion that the armed forces advise in the planning of future industrial complexes so as to guarantee that national security requirements be fully taken into account.

Some officials are even known to be discussing resurrection of the "Calles Doctrine." This was the mid-1920s directive of then-President Plutarco Elias Calles, during a period of intense hostility between Mexico and the U.S. government over oil development, that Mexico's oil fields were to be torched if the U.S. made moves to physically invade or support local insurrections.

Since its first weeks in 1977, the policy of the Carter administration and its NSC has been to keep Mexico as economically backward and politically unstable as possible, in order to minimize its international influence and maximize potential U.S. control of Mexico's Saudiized oil fields. Now, if Washington persists in its drive for a superpower confrontation over the Caribbean, amidst the broader dangers is the certainty that bilateral U.S.-Mexico relations will disintegrate.



Ambassador Nava's new diplomacy

In statements Aug. 15 and 21, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Julian Nava called Mexico a "battleground between the superpowers," and called on the Mexicans to "clarify" their relations with Cuba. It subsequently turned out to be the case that Nava had been ordered to provoke tensions between the U.S. and Mexico by the U.S. National Security Council. Meanwhile, Mexicans were amazed at what they heard. Nava told an Aug. 15 press conference:

There are various sectors of the U.S. public which are confused and fail to understand the intimate friendship between Mexico and Cuba. . . . I must confess that I myself don't completely understand it, because Mexico is basically democratic while Cuba is not. . . . It could be necessary for the U.S. to redefine its aid policy in the context of Mexico's foreign policy towards Cuba.

On Aug. 21, Nava told the Mexico City Lions Club:

The Mexican revolution was the first popular social revolution of the century. . . . I beg you not to forget your liberal history. . . . You owe nothing to the Russian, Chinese, Cuban or any other revolution; rather this country, which today is a battleground between the world superpowers, has an experience which can serve many other countries.

The Mexicans responded to Nava's statements with uniform outrage:

Ruling PRI party: We are a free country which maintains relations with whomever we wish.

El Herald, Aug. 17 editorial: There are many in Mexico who . . . have long had their doubts concerning the U.S. but who have not been able to call a press conference to demand of the Carter administration, for example, an explanation of the close, cordial and intimate relations that Nava's (eminently democratic) country maintains with (eminently communist) China. We do not understand this either; but his government, like ours, must

have equally powerful reasons for maintaining and encouraging these relations.

El Nacional, Aug. 23 editorial: Mr. Nava is a great academic, but not much of an ambassador. . . . In his spontaneous oration, Nava made the brilliant discovery that the Mexican revolution owes nothing to either the Russian, Chinese or Cuban revolutions—a rather obvious truism given that our revolution occurred many years before the Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions.

Nevertheless, what was most surprising in Dr. Nava's speech was his charge that Mexico is the battleground between the major powers . . . perhaps through cloak-and-dagger espionage concerning which Nava—as representative of the most powerful country in the world—must render account. . . .

It is necessary to forcefully and absolutely reject the notion that any fight of the sort Mr. Nava implies be conducted on our territory. If there is one thing we know, it is how to defend our sovereignty and our ideological independence.

Mr. Nava is a good man . . . despite the fact that his diplomatic talents are not noticeable and would probably be better demonstrated by keeping his mouth shut. . . .

Joaquin Gamboa Pascoe, President, Mexican Senate: I think that Mexico's position on matters of international policy is well defined: We do not accept advice, nor suggestions, nor intervention. . . . [Our policy] is based on full sovereignty, self-determination and non-intervention. . . . Whoever thinks that they can alter these principles is mistaken.

El Herald, Aug. 24 editorial: The Senator [Gamboa Pascoe] has made statements that are not uncalled for. It is always good for everyone, Mexican and foreigner alike, to remember that Mexico is an independent nation, jealous of its sovereignty, and its government will not tolerate interference, no matter where it comes from.

Mexican Democratic Party: We are all grown-up enough now to be able to shape our own destiny.

Socialist Workers Party: The least that this gentleman can do is return to his country to finish his studies in diplomacy—that is, if he ever began them.

Popular Social Party (PPS): [Nava] doesn't have the slightest idea of what diplomatic relations between two countries should be, especially between Mexico and the U.S., who share a border of thousands of kilometers. . . . He has no business expressing his views, and that is why the PPS reiterates that he should leave the country, although it seems that he wants to be pushed out.