

will be meaningful only if the agreement reached provides for the substantial reduction of those Soviet forces which threaten the ability of the Alliance to fulfill the deterrent function. Only then can the scale of NATO's TNF modernization program be reduced. The achievement of such an agreement will be difficult but must be pursued as a high priority objective.

By taking these steps, the Alliance will be better able to respond to the challenge of European disillusionment. Still, the battle for European public opinion will have to be fought over and over again. Anti-nuclear and pacifist sentiments stirred by the realities of vulnerability and the perceived suspicions of US intentions will continue to exist. Although limited in its ability to influence public perceptions and desires, the Alliance leadership can and must act to maintain support for an effective military capability, adequate to respond to aggression at any level. The common bonds which have united the Alliance since its inception — the shared mutual threat and the sharing of mutual values, including the avoidance of war — remain strong.

## Mexico's Presidential Succession: Miguel de la Madrid and Policy in 1982

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During the summer of 1981, after four years of economic boom and increased international attention, Mexico was jolted by a precipitous drop in oil prices and criticism of its Central American regional policy while in the midst of its little known, yet very important, presidential succession process. Political turmoil surrounding a decision to cut oil prices resulted in the resignation of *Petroleos Mexicanos'* Director Jorge Díaz Serrano and an intense internal debate concerning the direction which the country might be expected to take during the next presidential term to be in December, 1982. President López Portillo, sensing that traditional domestic uncertainty surrounding his imminent selection of a successor had begun to cause bureaucratic paralysis at upper levels of government,

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decided to move up the decision to "unveil" the official party candidate, which had been expected to occur after the carefully orchestrated North-South conference in Cancún in October.

The choice of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado, a 46 year old lawyer and economic planner, highlights the unique mechanism which for over 50 years has been used to name men to the all-powerful presidency of Mexico's institutionalized revolution. The decision to elevate Miguel de la Madrid also reveals much about what Mexican leaders think are the urgent needs of the country; the President of Mexico assumes absolute power for six years and decides literally all matters national importance. De la Madrid must decide whether to attempt to reduce inflation or emphasize rapid growth, as well as choose between support for regional liberation movements or a hard-line military solution to insurgency, as urged by American policymakers.

### *Presidential Succession*

During the weeks immediately preceding the September 25th announcement, characterized by internecine conflict among cabinet-level ministers bound by a strict code of silence and denial of outward presidential ambition, politicians at every level of government attempted to sift through rumor and innuendo in order to align themselves with "the right one" before his identity became known. Amidst a feverish jockeying for political prestige and position in secret, rules of Mexican political culture prohibit open competition. As he prepared to deliver his fifth and penultimate State of the Union message on 1 September of his fifth year, all eyes focused on the President, to whom the final decision belonged.

The mystery which envelops the key to this secretive process of presidential succession may be understood as a series of historical and cultural conditions which arose from the Revolution of 1917. The national myth of Mexico holds that the Revolution, which lasted from 1910 to 1928 and tore the country apart, is still going on. The revolutionary credo is perpetuated by the dominant ruling political coalition, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (known popularly by the acronym "PRI" for *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), which has won every national election in the past 60 years. Mexico is a nation of institutions rather than charismatic strong-men or pistols, as Mr. López Portillo has stressed throughout his presidency.

The career of a politician who eventually becomes president of Mexico differs from that of his counterparts in most US or Western European countries in the sense that, whereas the latter systems are constituent-based and draw influence from popular support, the former is more cor-

porate in nature, depending on closely-knit relationships and maneuvering within a distinct power elite. The real electors of a Mexican president are his superiors, because his actual base of support comes from above rather than outside the political structure. The rise to become president of Mexico, like that of an executive in any large multinational corporation, rests on multiple premises of subservience, accountability, secrecy and ability to manipulate well-defined, if not explicitly stated, relationships. The president, who determines domestic and foreign policy, has spent a lifetime mastering these complex concepts, and will orient critical decisions on a personal perception of circumstances much as an American president instinctively weighs "public reaction" as much out of habit as necessity.

Mexican observer Frank Brandenburg has written that "the 'liberal Machiavellian' heading Mexico must be authoritarian and at the same time perform the role of benevolent patriarch. He must preserve political stability, keep unions and the army loyal, insure peaceful transfer of power, and stamp out subversion; he must also accord human rights a fair degree of dignity, advance social justice, elevate living standards, and permit open criticism."<sup>1</sup> The president is a personalistic leader, standing at the head of a massively centralized bureaucracy which enables continuous political control to be institutionalized. Since the early post-revolutionary era of military strong men, the president, as head of both government and the dominant party, rules over an executive group which must respond to a changing balance of rapidly-multiplying interests. The president enjoys discretion over the use of federal funds which, replacing strong-man tactics of more overtly repressive earlier times, allow singular dominance of decision making and implementation at every level of national life. Molded by years of low-level subservience and attention to detail, Mexican chief executives are prepared to assume a role which comprehends power and cautions against abuse of privilege. Although revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata is reputed to have suggested that the presidential chair be burned so as to thwart men's natural ambition, presidents enjoy "almost mystical power, personifying the nation as did the Aztec Emperor and Spanish Viceroy."<sup>2</sup> The president as a politician "can enjoy intoxicating adulation and unquestioned loyalty . . . He is not a democratic ruler, because he was named by his predecessor and need answer to neither congress nor the judiciary. Rather, his extraordinary power is more analogous to that of a monarch, or even a pope . . . He sits atop the pyramid

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1. Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 342.
  2. Alan Riding, "The Mixed Blessing of Mexico's Oil," *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 January 1981, p. 34.

of power and everyone else looks upward. His personal style of government gives shape to his administration more than his policies."<sup>3</sup>

The process known as "unveiling" the official party candidate demonstrates the power of a president to enforce his wishes on the national political machinery. Every word and gesture, comment and allusion is minutely analyzed during the months prior to the late summer revelation of the candidate of the PRI from among senior government leaders. No other event arouses such attention as does the succession, with politicians, civil servants and businessmen aligning themselves behind favorites, dividing the ruling class into factionalized camps and injecting uncertainty into the rhythm of decision making. The process unfolds in two distinct stages: first, a candidate is selected from among a small group of high-level aspirants; second, the enormously symbolic uncovering process pushes the "unknown one" into several months of frantic campaigning, aimed at introducing the future president to the entire nation as quickly as possible. After months of sectoral consultations with various leaders in which he heeds the overall direction he wants the nation to take, the president "uncovers" the politician he deems to be most closely identified with the consensus.

The president, as head of political and governmental apparatus, determines not only what government does but also, most critically, who enters it. As the central element in initiating interest and mobilizing support for a policy area, presidents are able to stamp foreign and internal programs with their particular personality. Ministers who, under the aegis of executive authority, carry out the broad guidelines of policy are in so doing waging a discreet campaign for prominence and consideration at the time when presidential succession becomes necessary. Therefore, the process itself is often a vehicle for larger aspirations, and foreign policy together with domestic policy can often be the result of selection pressures as much as innately sovereign considerations. Policy makers and foreign observers wishing to predict Mexico's course can begin to see future direction by a close look at presidential succession, its candidates and conflicting interests. Comprehending presidential succession in Mexico is fundamental to understanding the country itself and its overall policy. President López Portillo recently declared that differences between the United States and Mexico could be termed "procedural," but, as if alluding to the historical and psychological distinctions between them, proceeded further to say that for Mexicans, "procedure could perhaps determine substance."

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3. Alan Riding, "Facing the Reality of Mexico," *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 September 1981, p. 86.

*Miguel de la Madrid and Policy — Development Politics and Relations  
with the US*

"Politics have everything to do with influence and power," reflected de la Madrid to a journalist recently.<sup>4</sup> This is not a quote which surprises those who have known Miguel de la Madrid, for it seems almost natural to one whose political career is a classic example of bureaucratic advancement. Influence and power have been constant factors of the posts he has occupied both in government and the private sector: Assistant Manager at the Bank of Mexico, Undersecretary of Credit at the Ministry of Public Finance, Vice-director of Finance at *Petroleos Mexicanos*, then Director of Public Credit and finally Undersecretary and Secretary of Planning and Budget — in which position he formulated Mexico's first Global Development Plan.

Miguel de la Madrid, then, becomes president as one of the principal authors of modern Mexico's development, a process he wants to accelerate. "The revolutionary government will neither ignore nor cover up problems," he proclaimed, "because we prefer criticism of careful development to that of improvisation and waste. We are neither a dogmatic nor completely political administration, but rather one of revolutionary conviction and good faith."<sup>5</sup> De la Madrid believes Mexico's oil revenues must serve to rescue those Mexicans who have yet to see progress. "It is time to do away with the idea of growth first, and distribution later, for many are the problems which cannot wait," he promises, "we must take what we have to those who have not, so that not having to wait, they can join in a national march toward progress."<sup>6</sup> This rhetoric, while characteristic of all Mexican presidents of recent time, symbolizes the revolutionary ethic which pervades Mexico's capitalist reality, and determines the parameters of de la Madrid's future as president.

Understanding the nature of the Mexican presidency, as well as the tenor of recent relations between an outgoing José López Portillo and an incoming Ronald Reagan, also enables observers from both countries to speculate about the near future of bilateral relations. Many nations may share common principles of social, political and economic development and, on the basis of such a mutual set of interests, attempt to form a common policy during situations of crisis. The fundamental background of United States-Mexican relations could well be placed in such a scheme. Nevertheless, the existence of overall agreement does not preclude either the treatment or recognition of differences, be they substantive or pro-

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4. *Excelsior*, 27 September 1981, p. 18.

5. *Excelsior*, 26 September 1981, p. 37.

6. *Excelsior*, 20 September 1981, p. 22.

cedural. Nor may the focus of means or ultimate ends be obscured between nations, for such are clear evidence of the peculiar national character and style which distinguishes one from another. Miguel de la Madrid believes, as does José López Portillo, that differences with the United States are procedural and not basic, but both men have cautioned, that procedure might determine substance.

For the United States, a myriad of issues from illegal immigration to oil exports will directly hinge on the continuation of, or departure from, the López Portillo leadership of recent years. President López Portillo attempted to improve the strained relations which he inherited from predecessor Echeverría in 1976, but they only worsened during four awkward years of confrontation with the Carter administration. During meetings with Ronald Reagan, the two Presidents have established a cordial rapport which some in the Mexican press describe as "brotherly." Yet President López Portillo's statements indicate the philosophical, as well as purely political, differences which separate United States and Mexican viewpoints. "That which exists between Republicans and Democrats also exists between Americans and Mexicans," noted López Portillo at the dedication of the Gerald R. Ford Library in Grand Rapids, Michigan in mid-September, 1981. "We have agreed on many things, fortunately, and have tested our friendship with serious disagreements. The test has been satisfactory, and our friendship has been strengthened."<sup>7</sup>

Mexico sees itself as a mediator in Central America, rather than as a power or superpower referee, and officially favors dialogue and discussion as a means to political resolution of the Salvadorean and Guatemalan conflicts. "Naturally I spoke with President Reagan about matters [Mexico's joint support, with France, of a fully negotiated settlement of the Salvadorean conflict], and insisted on two points: first, to undo the paradoxical notion that Mexico is intervening in the internal affairs of El Salvador and; second, that only a political solution is capable of resolving the tension and misunderstanding in the area."<sup>8</sup> It is Mexico's insistence on economic, and not political or strategic concerns, which underlies the frequent misunderstandings between its foreign policy and that of the United States. The divergence in policies toward Central America also reflects different perceptions of the need to initiate North-South dialogue, one which Mexicans feel has yet to exist.

The East-West conflict, when contrasted with North-South relations, is interpreted by many Mexicans as irrelevant to the immediate concerns of the Central American region. Yet, most agree that to write off casually

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7. *Excelsior*, 19 September 1981, p. 10.

8. *Excelsior*, 24 September 1981, p. 12.

the political maneuverings of world powers would be to overlook the interrelation of the East-West and North-South dilemmas. Contemporary international politics make it difficult to separate or isolate single issues, be they global, regional, bilateral or multilateral, from the economic context.

It is important to view Mexican-US relations in terms of the endogenous factors which underlie the Salvadorean crisis, and Mexico's own social contradictions: New found oil wealth combined with deteriorating demographic and agricultural conditions. Mexico assumes that priority must be given to economic assistance and national development, and refuses to conceive of the Central American crisis in terms of an East-West competitive power gambit. Conversely, the United States focuses on the Cuban and Soviet presence in the region, and distinctly downplays the profound social contradictions in which Central American armed revolt has surfaced. The Reagan doctrine, more acutely aware of Soviet influence than internal disequilibrium, highlights an American aversion to recognizing or even accepting the notion of revolutionary change. For this reason relations between the two countries have come to be characterized by the phrase: "agreement to disagree."

To ignore the existence of a strong opposition to the Duarte government — an opposition which Mexicans insist is a direct consequence of North-South economic reality — is to completely overlook the very problems which have caused the eruption of a large-scale civil conflict. The need for recognizing the existence of the opposition is as real and compelling a fact, Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda has noted, as is the government-junta request for arms with which to combat that force. During talks among Presidents Reagan and López Portillo, and Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau at the North-South Conference in Cancún, President Reagan expressed the view that regional assistance could increasingly depend on the private sector and multinational efforts, and less on multilateral organizations which rely on governmental funding support. Both President López Portillo and Prime Minister Trudeau responded that multinational corporations have long abused a privileged position in developing countries, and they would have to be safeguarded from further incidence of these effects. The poor nations of the region, López Portillo has said, are being brutally punished by the effects of a world economy which ignores them. United States political concerns in the region, accentuated by the Reagan administration, will be sharply contrasted by Mexico's economic and social perspectives under Miguel de la Madrid. Like José López Portillo, he will only have to consider his own country to be reminded of economic revolution. The problems of Central America and the Caribbean

are, President López Portillo has said, only a microcosm of the larger problems of the entire developing world.

Mexico's oil resources will also play a role in her relations with the US: Several days before becoming the official candidate of the PRI, de la Madrid suggested that Mexico will export only that petroleum which is necessary to maintain its economy, "without pressure or constraints from anybody."<sup>9</sup>

The future President worked as a Finance Director in the national oil company and understands, as few incoming presidents before him, the significance of Mexico's petroleum resources for foreign and domestic issues. Candidate de la Madrid, continuing the López Portillo line, will project Mexico's new power and influence in negotiations with the Reagan administration. United States policy makers, recognizing Mexico's international stature, will be forced to concede that no US initiative in a Mexico-conscious Caribbean region will succeed in opposition to the de la Madrid government. President López Portillo has repeatedly refused to decouple oil and natural gas negotiations from emotionally charged disputes, such as immigration and produce exports. As distinct from negotiations with other nations, he claims, everything impacts on everything in bilateral US-Mexican relations. De la Madrid will adhere to the López Portillo concept of "no isolated issues" if only because during the last six years the pressure for resolution of regional problems has escalated. "There are other hard interests," warned de la Madrid pointedly, "which lacking a sane perspective of humanitarian values, continue to create situations of conflict and aggression." The politics of oil must serve to increase the independence of future generations, the candidate has said, and Mexico's role in the region will "continue to demonstrate that we have a political and economic capacity."<sup>10</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The first Mexican president to have pursued graduate studies in the United States, Miguel de la Madrid is acutely aware of the economic and social dialectics which, inextricably binding the two nations together, he must alternatively placate and challenge. Although he will be obliged to adhere to strong rhetorical defiance of the United States and its perceived intervention into Mexican domestic affairs, he must maintain the considerable progress of private sector expansion which has taken place during five years of cultivated financial ties. Mexico shares a formidable range

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9. *Excelsior*, 20 September 1981, p. 1.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.



of issues with the United States along a thousand mile border, from illegal immigration and drug smuggling to fisheries and natural gas pricing. However, the dynamic of oil, along with Mexico's growing regional authority, adds global and strategic dimensions to what has been for decades merely an unpleasant sibling conflict.

For American policy in Latin America, there is no event more singularly decisive than the matter of Mexican presidential succession. American analysts have understood neither the nature of the Mexican presidency nor the political culture which conditions it, and consequently have consistently projected Washington mentality on the corporate structure of an entirely distinct system. "Poor Mexico," lamented the infamous dictator Porfirio Díaz, "so far from God, yet so close to the United States."

Capping a lifetime spent in the turbulent arena of Mexican bureaucracy, de la Madrid may certainly reveal surprises during the next few years. Silence and discipline will become the tasks of others after inauguration day, as both Presidents Echeverría and López Portillo demonstrated in breaking sharply from their respective predecessors' policies in 1970 and 1976. De la Madrid is giving few hints, however, of which way the wind may blow in Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

The day after Miguel de la Madrid's unveiling, Secretary of the Interior Enrique Olivares Santana nonetheless suggested that his candidacy "is a guarantee of continuity," and described the future president as the "symbol of fundamental, national and revolutionary principles which are sustained and sought by the majority of Mexicans; continuation of the national unity promoted by President López Portillo "was never in doubt."<sup>12</sup> For policy-makers and Mexican observers, de la Madrid's candidacy signifies a continuance of the independent economic, and committed political, stances of the José López Portillo Presidency. During a short walk with reporters on the day of his designation, he passed through the National Palace and proceeded up the principal stairway to the President's office. "I've worked here almost all of my adult life," he said.

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11. *Excelsior*, 27 September 1981, p. 18.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 1.