

DE LA MADRID AND REAGAN MEET IN MAZATLAN

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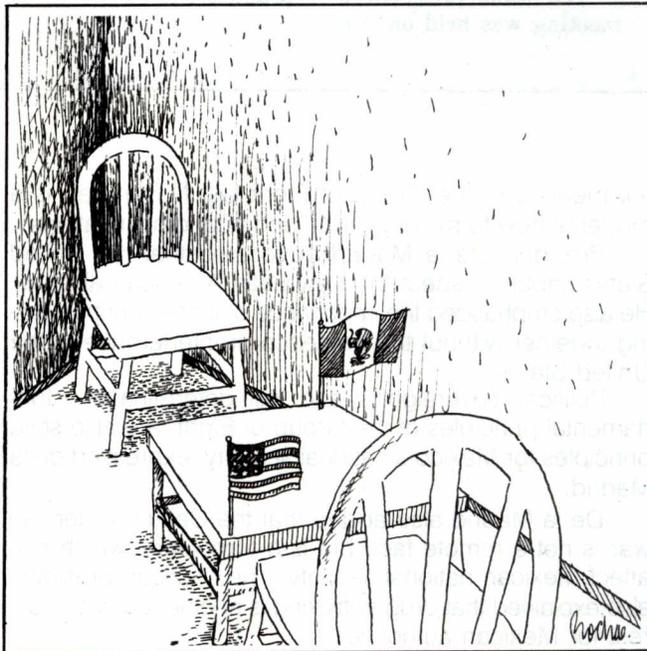
Mexico and the United States have entered a new period of adjustment in their relations, where they must combine mutual interests with their national security requirements. Presidents Miguel de la Madrid and Ronald Reagan began an open discussion during their meeting in Mazatlan, their sixth and last meeting. The discussion will have to be continued by their successors, since general elections are being held in both countries this year. Mexico's next president will enter office in the first week of December, while the next U.S. president will be sworn in late January 1989.

In the Mazatlan reunion the two leaders had before them the largest agenda they have looked at in their five previous meetings. This year, economic issues attracted most of their attention with talks aimed at consolidating cooperation.

During 1987, bilateral trade had a value of nearly 34 billion dollars with a surplus for Mexico of 6.1 billion dollars. Mexico is the United States' fourth largest trade partner and one of the most important recipients of U.S. investments. It is also one of the main markets for U.S. agricultural exports. The fact that some 3,000 U.S. companies have official representation in Mexico indicates the degree of shared economic interest on both sides. The United States is the main buyer of Mexican exports, and each year, U.S. tourists constitute the largest group of visitors to Mexico. Meanwhile, Mexico is trying to increase its participation in U.S. textile, steel and agricultural markets, and in technology transfer.

A comprehensive agreement on textiles was signed at the end of the Mazatlan meeting. It is also expected that an agreement on satellite and information transfer will be signed in the near future.

The two presidents agreed that commercial collaboration is fruitful and can be improved, particularly after the signing of the commercial accord in November 1987, which established a bilateral mechanism for permanent consultation.



De la Madrid and Reagan underlined, as often as they could, the possibilities open for improving economic relations. They invoked their personal friendship and declared that their series of high level meetings was an example of the mechanisms used by the two countries to keep open a privileged channel of communication. A typical result of this favorable climate is the close association between both governments in facilitating renegotiations on Mexico's foreign debt. The exchange of bonds for debt allows Mexico to reinvigorate its finances and provides the United States with the guarantee that Mexico's debt crisis will not follow an unpredictable path.

The presidents also discussed points of conflict in bilateral relations. Mexico would like to strengthen its bargaining position by developing stronger ties with other Latin American countries. Thus, de la Madrid declared that "the new concept of regional security arising after the sum-

SIX YEARS OF PRESIDENTIAL SUMMITS

MAZATLAN — Before the meeting held in February in this Mexican port Presidents Miguel de la Madrid and Ronald Reagan, had already met five times.

The first meeting took place on October 9, 1982, in sessions alternately held in Tijuana and Coronado. De la Madrid was then President elect. He did not take office until December 1 that year. However the meeting served as an opportunity to express a mutual desire for cooperation.

The second presidential meeting was held on Au-

gust 14, 1983, in La Paz, on the southern tip of the Mexican peninsula of Baja California. The first and only summit of the Contadora group had just taken place, and the Central American crisis was the dominant theme of the talks. On this occasion the presidents signed the Agreement on Cooperation for Protection and Improvement of the Environment in the Border Area, and also reached agreements on U.S. credits to be given to Mexico for the purchase of basic food products.

Reagan received his Mexican colleague in Washington from May 15 to 17, 1984. Again, Central America was a central theme in the talks, with both countries expressing widely different opinions. While the presidents acknowledged their differences, they expressed mutual interest in continuing discussions.

On January 4, 1986, President de la Madrid received his U.S. colleague in Mexicali. Central American affairs were still of interest, but they no longer had first priority on the agenda. Greater in-

terest was placed on the external debt, the Latin American economic situation, and drug trafficking.

The fifth presidential meeting was held in Washington from August 12 to 14, 1986. Central themes in the discussions were Mexico's economic recovery and the struggle against drug trafficking. De la Madrid and Reagan agreed to look for ways to increase trade and investment and they fixed a one-year period to conclude an agreement which would serve as framework for further negotiations on these commercial issues.

mit meeting of the Group of Eight last November, is a model of new forms of political and economic relations."

President de la Madrid advocated that the United States should respect the new Latin American alliance. He also emphasized the importance of these countries acting together without the presence or interference of the United States.

Political sovereignty and self-determination, fundamental principles of the Group of Eight, are also solid principles for Mexico's national security, expressed de la Madrid.

De la Madrid also added that the Central American war is not a remote fact, but is a turbulence which can affect Mexican national security. The Mexican president also explained that drug trafficking is another source of unrest for Mexican authorities.

Reagan's Reply

Reagan responded to the Mexican president's speech, by calling on Mexico to join the "struggle against totalitarianism." He said that because the two countries share common principles, such as peace within democracy, Mexico should join the struggle against totalitarianism. Reagan insisted that totalitarianism is represented by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua.

When the U.S. President began discussing totalitarianism at the official dinner offered by Mexico the faces of the Mexican officials, including that of de la Madrid himself, became downcast and some members of the Mexican delegation exchanged apprehensive looks. The Mexicans probably did not expect such a bellicose and ideological declaration. From the general tone and atmosphere, many observers had expected that at last the presidents would meet without conflictive elements.

The differences of opinion were so notable that a joint communiqué was not produced, despite agreement in the areas of trade, investment and border cooperation. Nor was there a joint press conference. Officials from each nation separately explained the outcome of the meeting to news media.

The Mexico's Foreign Minister, Bernardo Sepúlveda, and U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz each declared that the meeting was successful, but they qualified their statements with the different points of view of their respective governments.

There was no further debate on strategic perspectives, but the lines had been drawn a —Latin American alliance which tries to promote national development with respect for the self-determination of each nation on the one hand, and the proposal for a military association against totalitarianism on the other.

While economic cooperation was on the top of the president's agendas, Central America and drugs cropped up

The issue of drug trafficking was an important item in the talks. Although de la Madrid tried to discuss the drug problem solely in judicial terms, so that it would not extend into other diplomatic areas and affect bilateral relations, Reagan managed to carry the theme into the field of political discussion. Thus, de la Madrid was forced to insist that Washington should make greater efforts to combat drug consumption within its own territories.

Drug trafficking could become a pretext used by the Reagan administration to justify greater intervention in



Presidents Miguel de la Madrid and Ronald Reagan. (Photo by Pedro Valtierra)

other countries. Whether this will be the case with Mexico remains unclear, although Mexico has consistently rejected the suggestion that U.S. troops participate directly in the fight against drug trafficking. The United States has not insisted on the use of U.S. troops over the last two years.

But whatever direction is taken in the next few months, it is clear that the debate will not be limited to a judicial discussion. The crux of the conflict lies in United States' accusations that Mexico has made insufficient efforts to combat drug trafficking, while Mexico declares that its efforts have not been properly recognized by the United States. Mexico also complains that while it does not have insufficient resources to combat the problem, the world's biggest drug market flourishes across the border.

The theme of drug trafficking could begin to create new conflicts between the two nations. The United States could use it as an element to pressure Mexico to collaborate with the United States' plans in Central America. Mexico will resist but it has to overcome pressures exercised by the U.S. government and press.

The conflict cannot go too far. The United States cannot put unlimited pressure on Mexico, since it is clear that the United States wants a strong and stable government here. At the same time, Mexico cannot prolong the confrontation with its northern neighbour which represents a substantial part of its economic present and future. To resolve this difficulty in a manner satisfactory to both sides is the principal challenge that must be solved by both presidents, and especially by their successors. □