

Mexico in the UN Security Council

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Mike Segar/Reuters

When Vicente Fox became Mexico's president December 1, 2000, he decided to radically transform the country's foreign policy, turning it away from passive and reactive nationalist diplomacy toward creating a new presence of Mexico in the world. The aim of this radical change is to contribute to the construction of an entirely new architecture of the international system.

The main step in beginning this new form of diplomacy was Mexico's seeking a seat on the United Nations Security Council for two years as a non-permanent member as of January 2002. To get the seat, Mexico had to win out over the Dominican Republic, the other Latin American candidate for the position.

When Mexico decided it aspired to a seat on the Security Council, before the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers, the international community was already facing important challenges in security matters. However, after September 11, being a member of the Security Council brings with it a great number of risks and commitments.

Mexico will have to face two matters in the Security Council: the U.S. war against Afghanistan, supported militarily by the majority of European countries and backed diplomatically by an even greater number of nations, and the transformation of priorities due to threats to international security. Heading that list of risks and challenges is the fight against terrorism, particularly that of radical Islamic groups.

After the September 11 attacks, Mexico's government came to a crossroads: how could a country with anti-U.S.

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and nationalist political forces express support for George Bush's government?

Mexico's press and some political parties immediately charged Vicente Fox with selling out the country and being pro-U.S. On the other hand, in the United States, people accused Mexico of not expressing unconditional support rapidly enough. This is the existential conflict of Mexicans, the political elites and the country's foreign policy. Diplomacy demands having your own character, being anti-U.S.; but at the same time, in moments of strategic definition, Mexico must support the United States.

This same dilemma arose during World War II. Mexico finally declared

weapons; one to protect maritime navigation; another to safeguard ocean platforms; one condemning terrorist extortion; the convention against terrorist bombings; and one regarding control of financing of terrorist groups. Mexico has ratified 10 of these and the Senate is currently considering the last two.

Among the main challenges that Mexico will face in the next two years are all the debates that will take place about the conflicts in the Middle East and the probable participation of United Nations (UN) military forces in peace-keeping operations, which will create tensions in Mexico's military defense policy; issues related to the environment and security, about which there will

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war on Germany, Italy and Japan in May 1942. On that occasion, the political debates and public opinion were similar to today until Mexican oil tankers were attacked by Nazi submarines in the Gulf of Mexico.

Today, participating in the Security Council will be a challenge since an important part of its work will concentrate on the conflict in Afghanistan and the war against terrorism. Mexico has ratified almost all the United Nations conventions against terrorism. Twelve international commitments have been signed since 1969: four dealing with the hijacking of airplanes and airport security; one to protect diplomats; an agreement about hostage taking; the convention on the protection of nuclear

certainly be important differences with the United States; and others with global implications like the development of stricter commitments for fighting terrorism, nuclear security and arms of mass destruction like chemical and biological weapons.

In the anti-terrorist coalition against Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and Afghanistan's Taliban government, the UN and the United States will probably create two fronts: the strictly military front and the diplomatic front, with the participation of those countries not taking part in the military offensive in the humanitarian aid to the seven million Afghan refugees predicted for the end of 2001. Mexico will have to assume some kind of responsibility in these

efforts; otherwise it would have no reason to be in the Security Council. This will challenge the country to find a new way of carrying out an active foreign policy.

We should remember that during the Cold War Mexico had very different positions from those of the superpowers on matters of weapons of mass destruction. The Mexican position is based on general, complete disarmament, while that of the countries with nuclear weapons—which, as permanent members, control the Security Council—is that of arms control, not elimination. This will be the first difference between Mexico and the United States, Russia, China, France and Great Britain.

In the war against terrorism, Mexico has edged closer to the United States and is actively cooperating with it, particularly in matters of intelligence, border security, diplomacy, air security and, in general, the control of foreigners who could enter the United States illegally through Mexican territory. Mexico has also put forward the possibility of building a North American security perimeter together with Canada so that the United States does not close its land borders given that the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement is in danger from a reduction in trade in goods along the borders and a drop in migration.

Another factor is Mexico's active participation in the new architecture of hemispheric security. During the Cold War, Mexico kept to the sidelines of the inter-American mechanisms for hemispheric security. However, it did participate in building the framework for global security by promoting the Treaty of Tlatelolco, consolidated in 1967, to create the nuclear arms-free

zone in the hemisphere. Similarly, in the 1980s and 1990s, Mexico sought peaceful solutions to the conflicts in Central America. It was one of the designers of the Contadora Group, which tried between 1983 and 1986 to achieve the signing of an overall peace agreement among the five Central American governments. Later, in 1990-1991, Mexico worked with the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) to achieve a peace agreement in Nicaragua to attain the demobilization of the counterrevolutionary irregular forces; in 1992, a peace agreement for El Salvador was signed in Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle; and in 1996, the Guatemala peace accords were signed. In the cases of El Salvador and Guate-

mala, Mexico invested a large amount of diplomatic and logistical resources.

Mexico's experience in peace negotiations, then, makes it recognizable as a mediator in international conflicts. This is the case today in the Colombian conflict in which, despite the enormous difficulties, partial gains have been made in initiating peace talks between the government and guerrilla groups.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, participating in the UN Security Council will be a great diplomatic opportunity, but at the same time an important challenge. The international tension arising out of the September 11 terrorist attacks make all security mechanisms and accords important. A new international security framework is being

built and many of its mechanisms and commitments will be designed in the Security Council.

The UN will play a very significant role in the conflict with Afghanistan and fundamentalist terrorist groups. Equally, mechanisms for cooperation against terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and illegal traffic of individuals; to protect air, sea and even electronic communications; security against biological, chemical and nuclear weapons; and proposals to support refugees and solve human catastrophes (like that of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran) will force countries like Mexico to participate more actively in accordance with its new responsibilities in the international system. **MM**