

Mexican Foreign Policy and the War

Roberto Peña Guerrero*



The demand for peace and the rejection of war have been constant in most countries of the world.

THE IDEAL SCENARIO THE COLLAPSE OF THE FICTION

The Vicente Fox administration's foreign policy was designed from the outset on the basis of two overarching orientations: the construction of a strategic relationship with the United States

* Coordinator of the Center for International Relations of the UNAM School of Political and Social Sciences.

The differences between Mexico and the United States about international security and militarist solutions are profound and irreconcilable.

and Mexico's active participation in the creation of a new international system, through a more intense presence in multilateral fora. The interaction between the two orientations was based on the premise that participation in multilat-

eral fora would counter the asymmetrical relationship with the United States.

Two years and four months into the administration, the advances and results have been minimal and controversial. In bilateral relations, the state

The U. S., exercising its status as the single hegemonic power, has pressured the world to ally with its purely military, police-like strategies and actions.

of affairs has gone from an initial festive enthusiasm, represented by the “spirit of San Cristóbal”¹ and the “privileged place” that President Bush gave Mexico in his foreign policy, to one of permanent disappointment, particularly because of the stymied negotiations of a migratory agreement, Fox’s main objective vis-à-vis the United States.

With regard to Mexico’s participation in multilateral fora, the attitude has gone from protagonism and cocksureness, such as when Mexico’s becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council was “cheered,” to a more measured, cautious stance. This is both because of the political-diplomatic errors that have been made (for example, the case of Cuba), as well as because of the pressure Mexico has been under to line up with U.S. positions (for example, with regard to the armed intervention in Iraq).

Despite the fact that the aims of these two orientations are valid and necessary, it would seem that they were developed in the context of an ideal, fictional scenario. Certain internal and external variables were over-valued. On the one hand, it was thought that political changes in Mexico, particularly the exemplary electoral process that gave Vicente Fox the presidency, endowed the new administration with democratic legitimacy. The government thought to capitalize on this abroad, taking advantage of what was called the “democratic bonus,” which allowed them to promote and support initiatives, some

of which have violated the doctrines of foreign policy laid out in the Mexican Constitution. This has caused serious internal breaks in the historic consensus that characterized the country’s diplomacy. On the other hand, foreign policy makers perceived that the changes in international society since the end of the Cold War, fostered to a great extent by economic globalization, foreshadowed the creation of a new system, where the three great assets of neoliberal globalization (democracy, the free market and respect for human rights) would begin to bear fruit, improving the well being of Mexican society.

However, this ideal scenario collapsed abruptly with the September 11 terrorist attacks, complicating the possibilities of moving forward on the two negotiating fronts defined by the overarching orientations. In bilateral relations, the “spirit of San Cristóbal” has faded to an anecdote, with the United States situating Mexico back in the real place it has historically occupied within White House’s foreign policy priorities. Thus, the ideal of a migratory accord is fading, with negotiations stymied until today. In addition, the “democratic bonus” has already run its course. In multilateral fora, particularly in the UN Security Council, the policy of global struggle against international terrorism imposed by the United States, exercising its status as the single hegemonic power, has pressured the world to ally with its purely military, police-like strategies and actions, in which war

once again occupies a preponderant place as a “means of solution” for international controversies. In this context of crisis, the activist impetus of Fox administration foreign policy has had to be moderated because, given White House pressure to automatically line up with its “crusade” against terrorism and the countries of the so-called “axis of evil,” the wrong decisions would carry with them grave costs both for Mexico as a country in its foreign relations and for the Fox administration itself and the president’s party.

THE REAL SCENARIO ● THE WAR CRISIS

The Fox administration has made a priority of its bilateral relationship with the United States to the degree of placing it at the center of Mexico’s entire international strategy. The reasons are impossible to argue with: the profound articulation between the Mexican and U.S. economies; the intense dynamic along the two countries’ shared border; and, in general, their structural links determined in the last analysis by the hegemonic role the United States plays worldwide, which redefine for Mexico the parameters of national, regional, hemispheric and world security.

However, it is clear that President Fox’s advisors saw only the ideal scenario and not the real one, in which a series of actors and factors have been pressuring inside the United States to make U.S. political, economic and military supremacy worldwide felt. The result was the very imposition of George W. Bush as president of the United States and the creation of a war cabinet from the very beginning of his administration. However, the September 11

terrorist acts were the detonators for the war cabinet to go into action. We are experiencing the consequences of that, with the world immersed in a context of permanent war, first with the invasion and military control of Afghanistan and secondly, with the current war against Iraq.

The real scenario took the Fox administration by surprise, even though some political and academic analysts had been insisting in recent years about the new threats to international security, among them international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The lack of an analysis of the immediate political balance of forces—that is to say, the military balance of forces—as well as the lack of a design of probable war scenarios, considering our proximity to the world's first military power, seem to be what is behind Mexico's foreign policy not being prepared and not even having had the appropriate diplomatic mechanisms for a quick response needed to deal efficiently with prevailing circumstances in international politics since September 11.

The pressure from the Bush administration for Mexico to support the White House's militaristic policies, particularly the military attack against Iraq, has reached levels that make Mexican society itself question them. The U.S. government has been concerned with Mexico's position in the Security Council since the passing of Resolution 1441, when Mexico aligned with the position to peacefully disarm Iraq and repeatedly opposed any unilateral stance. This was consistent with its foreign policy norms and principles, contained in the Constitution, particularly "the peaceful solution of controversies," "the proscription of threats or the use of force in

international relations" and "the struggle for international peace and security."

President Fox has repeatedly stated that Mexico is "against war" and "for peace and the peaceful disarmament of Iraq," and "against unilateral actions," in allusion to U.S. government policy. This position has earned Fox great support from Mexican public opinion at a time in which domestic political tempos are pressing because of the proximity of the July federal elections. However, during the days prior to the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. government unleashed a diplomatic offensive with the aid of its unconditional allies, the governments of England and Spain, against the other members of the Security Council seeking support for a second resolution to legitimize armed intervention in Iraq. But the offensive failed and the U.S. government began to make arrogant statements, like on March 6, when President Bush said that the United States "didn't need anyone's permission" to attack Iraq, and directly threaten the Security Council's permanent members, such as when Colin Powell said on March 9, "We'll see who is willing to veto a resolution brought by the United States," adding that France's decision to veto would bring "grave consequences in relations between the two countries." In that context, the pressures on the Mexican government became more obvious, to the point that Washington resorted to the good offices of its unconditional allies, such as with the surprise visit

Mexico's traditional pro-peace position is rooted in the geopolitical determinants of its proximity to the world's foremost military power.

to Fox by Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, to try to get Mexico to change its position.

Mexico has not only been pressured from abroad, but also from inside the country itself. Some politicians, academics and representatives of the business community have said that if Mexico does not step into line and support the United States, the risks of possible economic reprisals would be enormous. This discourse contains a fallacy since it is not in U.S. government interests to destabilize Mexico because that would affect its own interests and those of many U.S. businessmen. Therefore, any measure against Mexico would immediately cause a backlash.

At the same time, Mexico has adopted a position on the war in Iraq in accordance with its national interests. This affirmation not only has a specific weight in political discourse, but is also very realistic because of the consequences that a war in which the United States intervenes directly has for the country. Mexico's traditional pro-peace position is not the product of idealism, but is rooted in the geopolitical determinants of its proximity to the world's foremost military power, and the costs of supporting its war initiatives open up windows of vulnerability for our own national security.

Mexico is not threatened by international terrorism for the simple reason that it has never contributed, directly or indirectly, to what caused it, as the United States has. In addition, in the concrete

case of Iraq, some international actors think that the international sanctions that have been applied since Desert Storm and the disarmament that it has been subject to have minimized the threat that Saddam Hussein poses to the world. Therefore, a military attack against Iraq is counterproductive and will have unsuspected repercussions for world stability.

Wars detonate crises of all kinds. In Mexico there has been special concern about its effects on the national economy because, with the direct involvement of the United States, its main economic partner, and with an attack on an oil-producing country like Iraq, the consequences in the world oil market are immediate and will have important repercussions in Mexico. The first economic impact of any war is inflation. That is why possible scenarios can be developed based on the duration of the war. The most favorable scenario is a war lasting no longer than six weeks, with the consideration that this would allow for the elimination of market uncertainty and for reorienting the world economy, which would, at the same time, cause a three percent increase this year in Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP).² An unfavorable scenario would be a war that lasted longer than six weeks, causing the U.S. economy to go into recession and the devaluation of the dollar, inevitably dragging the Mexican peso along with it and probably producing negative GDP growth. A disastrous scenario, with a prolonged, indefinite war, would cause a world recession, in which oil prices could soar to up to U.S.\$60 a barrel, and Mexican GDP would drop sharply. The obligatory question would be: Is Mexico prepared to deal with the results of each of these scenarios?

Despite the resistance of world public opinion to the war, a dangerous discourse has been developed; in Mexico, some politicians and academics have reproduced it to justify supposed militaristic solutions to the threats the world is facing. This discourse is based on two premises: the real, undeniable presence of international terrorism and the possibility that terrorist groups and the countries that protect them could obtain or develop arms of mass destruction. This leads us to the question of how these threats can be eliminated and how the fight against terrorism should be organized. The U.S. government has provided the answer, particularly since 9/11, by saying that the United States is international terrorism's central target and that therefore its interests in the world are under threat. Accordingly, it has put itself forward as the leader of the global struggle against terrorism. This discourse seeks to convince all the world's countries to ally themselves to the militarist policy of the Bush administration.

However, in the concrete case of Iraq, there is no proof that Saddam Hussein's government has fostered terrorist groups or supported Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Neither is there any proof that it possesses weapons of mass destruction. This has caused suspicions internationally about the real aims of the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq.

Mexico's foreign policy vis-à-vis the hostilities in Iraq has two sides to it: on the one hand, reactivating diplomacy in the Security Council after the break that occurred, to contribute to the solution of the humanitarian crisis of the Iraqi people, and, on the other hand, separating as much as possible the issues on the Mexico-U.S. bilateral agenda

from the positions adopted in multilateral fora. Obviously, this contradicts the supposed interaction that should exist between the two orientations of Mexico's foreign policy, in which active participation in multilateral fora would be a counterweight to the asymmetrical relationship with the United States.

In summary, the differences between Mexico and the United States about international security and militarist solutions are profound and irreconcilable. But for concrete, objective reasons, Mexico must maintain its position about the peaceful solution to international controversies. Just as President Bush recently said about Mexico that he wants to have "a prosperous, peaceful neighbor," so the government and society of Mexico as a whole also want to have a prosperous, peaceful neighbor. Mexico, like the world, needs a U.S. leadership committed to peace and international security, that will use its hegemony responsibly to promote a more just, equitable international society in which the law and legality prevail over barbarism. ■■■

NOTES

¹ President Fox's San Cristóbal ranch was the site of the first meeting between him and George Bush, at which Bush stated that Mexico was U.S. foreign policy's number one priority. A short time later came the events of September 11. [Editor's Note.]

² Mexico's Finance Minister has revised this goal, reducing it to 2.5 percent in the best of cases. [Editor's Note.]