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For the fourth time in history and the second time this decade, Mexico has been elected a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. The importance of participating in this multilateral body is beyond debate. Not only is it possible to contribute pro-actively there to the resolution of the world's main conflicts, but it can also be used to promote our country's agenda in accordance with national priorities. So, in the following pages, different specialists examine Mexico's performance in the Security Council *vis-à-vis* its main debates and the five most influential nations represented there, the five permanent members.

Mexico and the UN Security Council

María Cristina Rosas*

Mexico is a founding member of the United Nations. Very early on, in 1946, it became a member of the UN's main body, the Security Council (SC). However, almost four decades had to pass before it served again as a non-permanent member from 1980 to 1981. The third time was also almost 20 years later, from 2002 to 2003. Today, Mexico is again a non-permanent member in this 2009-2010 term, breaking with its sporadic participation, given that for the first time it is occupying a seat twice in less than a decade.

Disarmament, particularly the fight against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, is an issue that goes along with Mexico's domestic needs. This is why its inclusion on Mexico's agenda for the Security Council is completely justified.

The SC is responsible for maintaining international peace and security and can even use force against those who transgress against world order. It has 15 members, five of whom are permanent and have the right of veto (the United States, the Russian Federation, Great Britain, France and the People's Republic of China). The other members represent the different regions of the world and participate for two years. In addition to Mexico, today's non-permanent members are Austria (until 2010), Burkina Faso (until 2009), Costa Rica (until 2009), Croatia (until 2009), Japan (until 2010), Libya (until 2009), Turkey (until 2010), Uganda (until 2010) and Vietnam (until 2009).

The world has changed significantly since the UN was founded, and in the twenty-first century, those changes are

even more dizzying. The relative certainty of the Cold War international agenda gave way to an unpredictable situation in which the United States, emerging victorious in the East-West conflict, is far from being the leader country that can guarantee peace and security. The September 11, 2001 attacks demonstrated the vulnerability of the planet's most powerful nation, alerting it to the importance of reinforcing international cooperation to deal with new challenges. One of the results of 9/11 is the primacy the fight against terrorism is given in the SC, to the detriment of other issues that are just as dangerous—or even more dangerous—for international security. Resolution 1373, passed September 28, 2001, catapulted terrorism to the category of “the main threat to international security,” considerably reducing the attention paid to other risks.

It is in this framework that Mexico is participating as a non-permanent SC member for the second time this century. The particularity of the Mexican presence, both in the 2002-2003 period and today, is that it deliberately sought to be a part of the select group of nations that have been part of the UN's highest body—suffice it to mention that of the 192 member states, 74 (38 percent) have never managed to participate in the SC. This is a privileged position, from which the most should be garnered for Mexico's national interest, including taking full advantage of the experiences that make it possible for it to contribute to international peace, security and cooperation in accordance with its foreign policy principles.

MEXICO'S SECURITY COUNCIL AGENDA

The agenda Mexico prepared for its tenure on the SC for 2009-2010 focuses on four issues:

- Traffic in small arms and light weapons
- Improving the situation in Haiti
- Strengthening mediation in conflict resolution, and
- Protecting children in armed conflicts (child soldiers).

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Mexico's UN Ambassador Claude Heller, acting in his role as president of the Security Council.

If we assume that a country's foreign policy is closely linked to its domestic policy, this is only the case with regard to the first point mentioned above. The illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons is a problem that directly affects national security because of its clear relationship with organized crime, particularly drug trafficking and the growing violence the country is experiencing. In addition, most small arms and light weapons circulating in Mexico enter the country across its border with the United States, a situation denounced several times by President Felipe Calderón (and his predecessors) to U.S. authorities, and very recently, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other high Obama administration officials.

This issue is part of the disarmament agenda that Mexico's foreign policy has long advocated. The Mexican government's outstanding role in nuclear disarmament during the Cold War's dizzying arms race headed by the United States and the Soviet Union is still remembered today. The Treaty of Tlatelolco went into effect 40 years ago on April 25, 1969, as a result of pioneering negotiations to ban nuclear weapons in a large inhabited region and was also a model for the articulation of new nuclear-weapons-free zones.

When the Cold War ended, the community of nations understood the importance of working to ban small arms and light weapons, the ones most used in world conflicts. Without denying the threat to the planet of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, which continues to concern Mexican diplomacy, small arms and light weapons are a major problem. They are military-grade weapons responsible for at least half a million fatalities a year worldwide—estimates come to one weapon for every 12 persons on earth. They have been used in 46 of the 49 armed conflicts registered in different parts of the world. In addition, 90 percent of fatal victims were civilians, and of those, 80 percent were women and children. Another problem is that there are three times as many small arms and light weapons in the possession of civilians as in government arsenals. For that reason, the Mexican government promoted the Interamerican Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Other Related Materials within the Organization of American States, which went into effect July 1, 1998.

In the 1990s, Mexico also promoted an initiative originally raised by non-governmental organizations concerning the eradication of anti-personnel landmines, ratifying the Treaty

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of Ottawa on June 9, 1998. More recently, it played a fundamental role in the creation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has already been ratified by the Mexican Congress. This makes it clear that disarmament, particularly the fight against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, is an issue that goes along with Mexico's domestic needs. This is why its inclusion on Mexico's agenda for the SC is completely justified.

Without denying their importance, clearly the other issues Mexico is promoting on the SC are more or less alien to the national agenda. Haiti is a country with which Mexico has diplomatic relations, although bilateral links are reduced to limited cooperation, for example, like Mexico's electoral assistance through the Federal Electoral Institute. The issue of child soldiers seems to be a particularly grave challenge in countries in Africa, where different circumstances, including low life expectancy, foster involving children as combatants in the continent's many armed conflicts.

Finally, mediation for conflict resolution is crucial, although it is not clear if Mexico is giving it so much importance during its SC participation as an alternative to the pressures the country frequently faces to commit troops to UN peacekeeping operations. This is the case because, since the end of the Cold War, the SC tends to emphasize the creation of peacekeeping missions to deal with world conflicts, apparently neglecting other options it has, like mediation, diplomatic efforts and even sanctions. Peacekeeping missions are expensive and require increasing numbers of civilian and military personnel, making UN calls for countries like Mexico to commit troops more frequent. These pressures increase with Mexico in the SC, given that one of its fundamental tasks is to decide about the creation, duration and mandate of these missions. Therefore, to a certain extent, it is logical that Mexico would emphasize diplomatic efforts and political negotiation for dealing with violent conflicts instead of *a priori* deciding to create a peacekeeping mission.

TOWARD A BETTER SECURITY COUNCIL AGENDA

If Mexico aspires to sitting more frequently on the Security Council, it must clearly define what the advantage would be for national interests. Naturally, this presupposes defining the national project and, for example, visualizing what the country would be like in 2050, or even beyond. The national project would help ensure that when each administration presents its development plan, it be in accord with a master plan. This would give continuity to foreign policy. It would also avoid improvisation and ensure that the opportunities that present themselves by being in forums as important as the SC are fully taken advantage of. A national project like this in no way contradicts the principles of Mexican foreign policy. On the contrary, it ensures projecting them better.

Once a national project is defined, Mexico could take many foreign policy actions that would position it better to promote its national interest and also generate leadership on the international scene. Among others, it should ponder the following:

- Better planning for its participation in the SC, both in terms of regularity and the issues to be dealt with;
- Identifying “niche agendas,” that is, international policy topics that Mexico could appropriately handle with the concurrence of other interested nations;
- Having greater dialogue both with permanent and non-permanent members of the SC, inside and outside the forum. The current dialogue with Great Britain, for example, has been very useful to Mexico, above all because of the importance of being closer to a country so close to the United States. This experience should be repeated with other nations like France and Russia. It would be unacceptable for Mexico not to swiftly reverse the deterioration of its relations with China, which has happened above all during the Vicente Fox and current Felipe Calderón administrations, due to issues that were not on the top of the bilateral agenda. Mexico cannot give itself the luxury of having serious clashes with any country, much less the People’s Republic of China.
- Given that one of the SC’s central issues is the operation of peacekeeping missions, it is very important for Mexico to define a policy in this area instead of postponing the debate. The risk it runs is that if it becomes politically unacceptable for the international community that Mexican troops do not participate in the peacekeeping missions, a precipitous decision may be made that would not be duly thought out.
- The same can be said of SC sanctions, about which Mexico has no specific policy;
- Given that Africa is one of the world’s most conflictive and impoverished regions, Mexico must make a concerted effort to improve its relations with the countries of that continent. Many SC resolutions refer to the diverse crises in Africa, and, if Mexico maintains only a marginal diplomatic representation there, it is leaving itself open to not having the information needed to make decisions. The same is true for the initiatives it promotes through the General Assembly, because Africa has 53 of the 192 votes there, and that is where, among other things, non-permanent SC members are elected.

As suggested above, occupying a non-permanent Security Council seat is a privilege of only a few countries. Therefore, participation in this important body must be planned and be part of promoting national interest, which is defined, in turn, as part of the national project. The twenty-first-century world demands that nations engage in activism because the problems they face are increasingly transnational, and only concerted action will contribute to their

solution. Mexico is a developing country with limited room for maneuver. Therefore, it has in the multilateral institutions the valuable opportunity to forge joint positions and agendas that are important both to it and to other nations.

It is in Mexico's interests that the world be more peaceful and prosperous, but that interest will not materialize by working sporadically with or isolated from the community of nations. **MM**

UN Security Council Is the U.S. Playing at Multilateralism?

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The pledge for multilateralism is the defining feature of Barack Obama's foreign policy as the newly elected president, and it has been used to indicate a radical shift from the George W. Bush administration: a fresh start for the U.S. in the world. The forty-fourth president's personality, beliefs and political career allow him to aspire to effectively launch such a campaign. So far, Obama's multilateralist strategy has been well received by international leaders and an important share of international public opinion; however, every single move is being tested and questioned, and not every initiative —bilateral or multilateral— can be considered totally successful. In this regard, the United Nations (UN) Security Council becomes an interesting arena for observing the United States' "new" behavior and, most importantly, for analyzing the international response and the construction of areas of opportunity for cooperation between permanent and non-permanent Security Council members, Mexico among them. In this sense, it can be argued that Washington's willingness is about to be tested in this very important arena.

As exclusive and outdated as the Security Council is, it remains a fundamental UN body, a sounding board for the U.S. position in the world and a mirror of power distribution among the countries represented. Although unreformed, the Security Council still plays a role, especially in defining positions on the issues that top the international security

agenda: North Korea's nuclear threat, the Arab-Israeli conflict and, of course, humanitarian aid. In order to understand the scope of U.S. action in the Security Council and its grand strategy's trends and risks, it is necessary to analyze the evidence of Obama's approach to the UN and his possibilities for success in a worldwide perspective.

THE MULTILATERAL PLEDGE

During the first months of his administration, Obama has established clear differences with George W. Bush in terms of approach, mechanisms and commitments on foreign policy. On this point, the most eloquent document is the USUN Progress Report: "A New Era of Engagement: Advancing America's Interests in the World" issued by the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Dr. Susan Rice.¹ In this document, the administration makes a clear, direct statement in favor of multilateralism and cooperation by recognizing that the U.S. cannot deal on its own with the threats of the twenty-first century and that the rest of the world cannot succeed without U.S. involvement. In this framework, diplomacy regains a paramount place in foreign policy strategy, and pragmatism overtakes ideology as the main guideline for decision making. The apparent dismissal of ideological tendencies is coupled with a steady attachment to principles. Actually, the debate between former Vice-president Dick Cheney and President Obama on closing Guantanamo illustrates perfectly the opposition between ideology and principle-led foreign policies.²

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