

The Economic Club of New York

Lesser Known Goals of
Mexican Foreign Policy

His Excellency Vicente Sanchez-Gavito,
Ambassador, Representative of Mexico
to the Council of the
Organization of American States

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In the year 1896, the President of Mexico in his message to Congress on the State of the Union, after commenting on the Monroe Doctrine, had this to say:

“But with respect to the objective we pursue (of attaining collective security) it is, in our opinion, insufficient that the obligation to defend the rest of the Republics of the Hemisphere against European attack be shouldered by the United States alone. Each of the Latin American Republics, through proclamations similar to president Monroe’s, should state that an attack by any foreign power, seeking territorial gains at the expense of, or limitations to the independence or changes in the political structure of any American Republic will be considered as an attack against all of us if the country directly attacked or threatened opportunely asks for assistance.”

It was not until 1947, when the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro on Reciprocal Assistance was signed, that the Mexican doctrine on the security of the Hemisphere became a treaty obligation. The principles of the Rio Treaty, moreover, were later embodied in the North Atlantic Pact governing NATO, freedom’s major bulwark since its inception. My two next examples are of Latin American initiatives with regard to which Mexico played an important role.

When the old Latin American project of establishing an Interamerican Bank seemed definitely discarded, mainly on account of the successful operation of both the Export-Import and the World Banks, Mexico revived the idea and forcefully advocated its acceptance at the Bogota 1948 Conference. The Treaty establishing the Interamerican Bank of Development did not enter into force until December 30, 1959. One year later the Bank started operating, and today has approved 83 loans for a total of \$323,350,000.

All of you who are familiar with Latin American economic problems know that if we were to choose the outstanding one, there probably would be unanimity in favor of the disparity between the price trend of the basic products we export and the manufactured goods we import. We Latin Americans calculate that since the end of the Korean Conflict this imbalance has caused losses to our countries of two billion dollars annually.

The several concrete measures that Mexico believes should be taken in order to minimize the impact of this state of affairs have been discussed at every important Interamerican meeting since 1945, but it was not until 1958 when a start was made, by means of the Coffee Agreement, towards an integral solution -- still one of the main goals of Mexican foreign policy. The stake of the American businessman in our success is not negligible, for Mexico alone buys daily over a million dollars more than it sells to your country.

As the last of my examples, I return to a project wholly Mexican -- at least as far as I know.

At the inaugural session of the joint meetings of the international Monetary Fund and the World Bank, held in Mexico City during the month of September, 1952, the President of Mexico said:

“We believe there is an area untouched till now except in very isolated cases: that of international investment through long term credits, at low interest rates, for purposes of public assistance, health and education. We understand that the technical assistance programs started in January, 1949, due to the generous initiative of the President of the United States of America, are the preparatory or preliminary step that will only bear fruit if advice is followed by the material means necessary for such proposals to become a reality.”

It was not until August, 1961, nine long, decisive years after this other goal of Mexican foreign policy was announced, that we signed, at Punta del Este, the agreement launching the Alliance for Progress -- a program whose objective require the extension of “long-term credits, at low interest rates, for purposes of public assistance, health and education.”

A word on the position of Mexico with respect to the Alliance for Progress, not because of the interest and enthusiasm it is generating throughout the Hemisphere but for reasons that I will later clarify.

If you were to cut through the verbiage of the Punta de Este Charter, I am sure you would agree with me that the core of the program is simply this: Accelerated economic growth and better standards of living are guaranteed to the peoples of those Latin American countries whose governments are willing and able (1) to institute programs of land reform, (2) modernize their tax systems and (3) view outside help as a complement to their own efforts (in other word, believe and practice self help).

1. The agrarian reform was started in Mexico by means of a law dated January, 1919.

Since then my government has given possession of approximately 120 million acres, that is, of two-thirds of the land under cultivation in Mexico, to more than 2 million men actually cultivating that land. Twenty five thousand acres daily are being put in the hands of those of our citizens still landless in spite of their dependence on agriculture.

2. With no connection whatever with the Alliance for Progress program but as a basic goal of all of our Administrations, announced many years ago and pursued in an orderly, well planned manner, we are progressing towards a fair and efficient tax system.

3. On the subject of self help, President Lopez Mateos has frequently stressed that Mexico has “always maintained that the development of a nation has to be accomplished primarily with its own resources and through the labor, talents and efforts of its citizens.”

I hope you will agree with me that my brief account of action on the part of Mexico with regard to important international problems denotes clear vision and maturity of thought. But I, naturally, go farther: I believe that Mexico's doctrine on Hemispheric security, chiefly because it was evolved at the turn of the century, when self-complacency reached its all time height, reveals a certain aptitude for the kind of imaginative political thinking the world so desperately needs today.

To many of you, who know Mexico only as the underdeveloped country that it is, or as the colorful, different place that it likewise is, what I have just said will seem presumptuous. It is not. It merely is a conclusion arrived at by someone who is influenced by a whole series of things: by the depth of his country's cultural background; by the fact that the first social revolution of the present century took place in that same country; by the circumstance that it was a successful revolution, for in spite of the havoc and suffering it caused, the lot of the people was improved and the hopes it gave birth to are still a seemingly inexhaustible source of inspiration and energy; by the achievements of that country's artists and architects; by the certainty, in a word, that Mexico, after floundering during the centuries necessary to produce its new racial prototype -- neither Spanish nor Indian -- has found itself.

I know of only one writer in the United States who has studied this fusion of the Western, Spanish component and the Oriental, Indian component which constitutes contemporary Mexico's spiritual makeup. Your great philosopher, F.S.C. Northrop, in his "Meeting of East and

West” and more recently in his work on Practical Politics gauges the potential of this new human being who make his entrance on the stage of history when a clash between the West and the Orient seems imminent.

How can it be possible, you will ask, that such an occurrence be taking place, so close to you, without your knowledge? I believe that we in my country are just as responsible as you for this incredible ignorance in the United States of what Mexico is and what it believes itself capable of being in the future.

You as a nation have been so successful and your cultural traditions are so homogeneous, that no one should be surprised by your lack of inquisitiveness. Therein lies, at least in part, your strength.

We, on the other hand, racially are introverted, and historical experience has made us even more so. In this connection, I would like to recall my previous reference to the Alliance for Progress because I believe that you will find the Mexican reaction to it illustrative.

My comments on the program, though brief, were I hope sufficient to give you the impression that we are honestly convinced that, as far as what it calls on the Latin American countries to do, it is, in essence, a duplicate of the blueprint of the Mexican Revolution. Why has this not been said? Why was Mexico silent on this point, at the August, 1961, Punta del Este Meeting?

The social program of the Mexican Revolution, mind you, was bitterly opposed in many quarters. What better opportunity, then, than that meeting and the present Alliance for Progress negotiations going on in Washington to assume a holier-than-thou, an I-told-you-so attitude?

Simply because such an attitude would not be Mexican. We are content in the knowledge that the Alliance for Progress requirements have been met in Mexico. Through a flaw, if you will, in our national character, we remain silent, interested spectators and nothing more.

This characteristic of ours explains also why in talking to you of certain significant goals of my country's foreign policy I have had to qualify them as "lesser known." We recoil from publicity and, when you get right down to it, as a people abhor public relations.

Mexico, and only Mexico, I can sense you thinking, is the loser. There, I do not agree.

If it were possible to study the cultural interchange between Mexico and the United States with the objectivity and technical tools we employ in analyzing our balance of payments, we would find Mexico the creditor. As a matter of fact, music would, I feel, appear as the only balanced item, for if once you were moved to sing "South America Take it Away" you can well imagine what we would like to do with "the twist" and with rock and roll. No item would show greater imbalance than your business methods and administrative procedures. Without IBM, for

instance, the Mexican Government, our Banks and business world in general, would come to a standstill.

In the meantime your neighbor, that man with a certain softness of approach, with an almost Oriental lack of aggressiveness, and a marked “human” attitude on every problem, quietly waits in the wings. He will, certainly, never influence your way of life to the degree you have influenced his. But he is as aware as you are that the fate of humanity depends on the solution to the conflict between East and West. And as he waits for his cue, he smiles a smile full of friendship towards you. It is also a self-assured smile, for your neighbor knows that in the fathomless depths of his being, that conflict has been solved.