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**Capitalizing on Castro: Mexico's Foreign Relations with Cuba and the
United States, 1959-1969**

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Dissertation

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

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Capitalizing on Castro: Mexico's Foreign Relations with Cuba and the United States, 1959-1969

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Jonathan Brown

This dissertation explores the central paradox of Mexico's foreign relations with Cuba and the United States in the decade following the Cuban Revolution—why did a government that cooperated with the CIA and practiced conservative domestic policies defend Castro's communist regime? It uses new sources to prove that historians' previous focus on the foreign and ideological influences on Mexico's relations with Cuba was misplaced, and that the most important factor was fear of the domestic Left. It argues that Mexican leaders capitalized upon their country's "special relationship" with Castro as part of their efforts to maintain control over restive leftist sectors of the Mexican population.

This project uses new sources to illuminate how perceptions of threat shaped Mexico's foreign and domestic politics. In 2002, the Mexican government declassified the records of the two most important intelligence organizations—the Department of Federal Security and the Department of Political and Social Investigations. The files contain the information that Mexico's presidents received about potential dangers to their regime. They reveal that Mexican leaders overestimated the centralization, organization, and coordination of leftist groups, and in so doing gave them more influence over policy than their actual numbers or resources logically should have afforded.

The dissertation uses the concept of threat perception as an analytic and organizational tool. Each chapter considers a different potential source of danger to the Mexican regime in the context of the Cold War and the country's relations with Cuba. For the sake of clarity, it breaks the threats into the categories of individual, national, and international, even though these subjective categories may blend into one another throughout the course of the analysis. The first chapter begins with an individual threat: Lázaro Cárdenas, a powerful former president who became one of Fidel Castro's most dedicated supporters. The next three chapters analyze threats on the national level by looking at the domestic groups that Mexican leaders perceived to be the greatest dangers to their regime. The final two chapters move to the international level and examine the roles of Cuba and the United States. As a whole, this study of the connections between Mexico's foreign and domestic politics makes a significant and timely contribution to the historiographies of modern Mexico, U.S.-Latin American relations, and the Cold War.

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Abbreviations

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación/General Archive of the Nation, Mexico
ALM	Adolfo López Mateos Presidential Papers
CCI	Central Campesina Independiente/Independent Campesino Center
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina/National Campesino Confederation
CNED	Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos/National Center of Democratic Students
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos/Confederation of Mexican Workers
DFS	Dirección Federal de Seguridad/Department of Federal Security
DGI	Dirección General de Inteligencia/General Department of Intelligence
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias/Revolutionary Armed Forces
FBI	Federal Bureau of Intelligence
FECSM	Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos Socialistas de México/Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico
FEP	Frente Electoral del Pueblo/People's Electoral Front
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GDO	Gustavo Díaz Ordaz Presidential Papers
IPN	Instituto Politécnico Nacional/National Polytechnic Institute

IPS	Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales/Department of Political and Social Investigations
JFK	John F. Kennedy Presidential Library
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional/National Liberation Movement
OAS	Organization of American States
OSPAAAL	Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia, y América Latina/Solidarity Organization of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional/Party of National Action
PCM	Partido Comunista Mexicano/Mexican Communist Party
PIPSA	Productores e Importadores de Papel, S.A./Producers and Importers of Paper
POCM	Partido Obrero-Campesino Mexicano/Mexican Worker-Peasant Party
PPS	Partido Popular Socialista/Popular Socialist Party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional/Institutional Revolutionary Party
SRE	Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores/Foreign Ministry Archive, Mexico
UGOCM	Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos/General Union of Mexican Workers and Campesinos
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/National Autonomus University of Mexico

Introduction

The governments of Mexico and Cuba forged a unique relationship in the decade after the Cuban Revolution. On January 2, 1959, less than forty-eight hours after General Fulgencio Batista ceded power to Castro's rebels, Dr. Teresa Casuso Morín sent a message from the Cuban embassy to Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964). Referring to Castro's departure from Veracruz to launch his revolution, she asked whether, as the nation with "the closest relationship to the cause of Cuba's liberation," Mexico would do them the honor of becoming the first country to recognize the new government.¹ Three days later, López Mateos accepted the invitation.²

During a tour of South America the following year, López Mateos repeatedly defended Castro's revolution. He reminded Venezuelan journalists that his country had been the first to recognize the new Cuban regime and compared Castro's agrarian

¹ Dr. Teresa Casuso Morín to Adolfo López Mateos, 2 January 1959, Gallery 3, Adolfo López Mateos Presidential Collection [hereafter ALM] 559.1/2, Leg. 21, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City [hereafter AGN].

² As President López Mateos explained to the U.S. ambassador in 1960, he alone had the constitutional right to formulate foreign policy. "[Meeting between López Mateos and U.S. officials]," 16 September 1960, U.S. State Department Files Microfilm (24,461), 712.00/9-1660, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas. *Note: Many of the archival documents do not have titles. Descriptive titles are provided in brackets for organizational purposes.*

On the whole, scholars agree that during this period Mexican presidents determined their country's foreign policy. Edith B. Couturier summed up the process in one somewhat simplified sentence: "The president leads; the legislature accepts; the bureaucracy implements." Edith B. Couturier, "Mexico," in *Latin American Foreign Policies*, ed. Harold Davis and Larman Wilson, 117-135 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 6. See also Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964); Guy Poitras, "Mexico's 'New' Foreign Policy," *InterAmerican Economic Affairs* 28 (1974): 59-77; Evelyn Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974).

reforms of May 1959 to those undertaken by his government since the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He told Brazilian reporters that Mexicans' revolutionary experience gave them a unique understanding of the events in Cuba.³ "Mexico," López Mateos claimed, "has formulated an entire theory about agrarian reform and land distribution founded on the principles of justice, [and] cannot but look favorably upon a country with similar problems [that] resolves them in agreement with the needs of its own people."⁴

The president of Mexico again demonstrated solidarity with the Cuban Revolution in June 1960 when he welcomed Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado in an official state visit. López Mateos met his counterpart at the airport, while a crowd of thousands cheered and waved colorful banners. In a speech that contained numerous comparisons between the Mexican Revolution and the more recent Cuban one, López Mateos stated, "We, who have travelled similar paths, understand and value the transformative effort that Cuba is undertaking."⁵ By connecting the two countries' experiences, the Mexican president validated Castro's actions and reasserted his own government's revolutionary credentials.

³ *Presencia internacional de Adolfo López Mateos*, vol. 1 (Mexico City, 1963).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵ *Los presidentes de México: Discursos políticos 1910-1988*, vol. 4 (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1988), 82.

As Castro increasingly allied his government with the communist bloc during the early 1960s, Mexico's defense of Cuba changed but did not cease.⁶ No longer praising the Cuban Revolution and comparing it to the Mexican one, President López Mateos and his representatives in the Organization of American States (OAS) instead began focusing on Cuba's juridical right to self-determination and non-intervention.⁷ In January 1962, the Mexican foreign minister cited those principles when he abstained from voting on OAS resolutions that expelled Cuba from the organization. However, his declaration about the incompatibility of a Marxist-Leninist government with the inter-American system struck Mexican audiences as a rare official critique of Castro's regime. Some worried that the statement foreshadowed the termination of relations between the two countries.⁸

The Mexican government put such worries to rest in 1964 when it refused to comply with OAS sanctions that sought to increase Castro's isolation. In July of that year, the Organization of American States resolved that all member nations that still maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba should sever them. Mexico alone refused to

⁶ For an excellent summary of the Cuban Revolution, including Castro's alignment with the Soviet Union, see Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷ On the doctrines of self-determination and non-intervention, see Ann Van Wynen Thomas and A. J. Thomas, *Non-Intervention: The Law and Its Import in the Americas* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1956); Wanjohi Waciama, "United States-Latin American Relations: A Study of the Evolution of the Doctrine of Non-Intervention in the Inter-American System" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1971); Allen E. Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸ "Punta del Este," *Política*, February 1, 1962.

comply. For the rest of the decade, it was the only Latin American country to maintain diplomatic relations and air contact with Cuba.⁹

By serving as a crucial link between Castro and the rest of the hemisphere, the Mexican government increased its own role in the Cold War, performed a useful function for Cuba, and risked retaliation from the United States. Mexican territory became a thoroughfare for people, money, weapons, and information travelling between Cuba and the rest of the Americas. The fact that Castro seized this opportunity to export revolution exposed the Mexican government to reprisals from Washington. U.S. leaders could use their political and economic leverage to cause problems for their southern neighbors.

However, Mexico's support for Cuba was not quite as wholehearted as it appeared. At the same time that the government publicly defended Cuba's right to self-determination and non-intervention, it privately cooperated with U.S. efforts to destabilize Castro's regime. Intelligence agents tapped the telephones of Cubans and their sympathizers in Mexico and submitted reports to the Mexican and U.S. governments on their every action. Ambassadors to Cuba facilitated the passage of information about the island to the United States. Mexican authorities even allowed a CIA agent to operate in

⁹ Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay also voted against all or part of the OAS resolution to isolate Cuba, but unlike Mexico, complied with the will of the majority and subsequently cut ties with the island. When Salvador Allende became president of Chile in 1970, he re-established his country's relations with Cuba.

Cuba was isolated in the Caribbean community as well; for example, the Jamaican government did not establish diplomatic relations with Castro's government until 1972. Wendell Bell, "Independent Jamaica Enters World Politics: Foreign Policy in a New State," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (Winter, 1977-1978): 683-703.

Canada, which did not become a member of the OAS until 1990, maintained relations with Cuba throughout the 1960s. However, trade and other forms of contact between Cuba and Canada were negligible. See John M. Kirk and Peter McKenna, *Canada-Cuban Relations: The Other Good Neighbor Policy* (Gainesville: Gainesville University Press of Florida, 1997).

their embassy in Havana. Seen in this light, the Mexican government's defense of Cuba rings hollow.

In addition, Mexican authorities' approach to domestic activism showed much less tolerance than their public defense of Castro's communist regime. They censored the press, denied electoral opportunities to new political parties, and imprisoned labor leaders and political dissenters. Government repression of leftist activism peaked in 1968 when soldiers and secret agents massacred scores of student strikers in the Plaza de Tlatelolco. Thus, during the same decade that López Mateos and his successor Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) touted their principled foreign policy, they used every method available to repress leftist groups and individuals within Mexico.

Why did the Mexican government, which employed conservative, authoritarian domestic practices, adopt a tolerant foreign policy and maintain relations with the Marxist-Leninist government of Cuba in the 1960s? The literature on Mexican foreign policy has largely focused on ideological and external influences. While some scholars have acknowledged internal influences, they generally underestimate their importance.

Diplomatic historians like Guillermo Garcés Contreras and Leticia Bobadilla González have argued that the ideological principles of self-determination and non-intervention dictated the country's foreign policy.¹⁰ They contend that the Mexican government recognized Cuba and maintained relations simply because it was following

¹⁰ Guillermo Garcés Contreras, *México: Cincuenta años de política internacional* (Mexico City: Partido Revolucionario Institucional and Instituto de Capacitación Política, 1982); Leticia Bobadilla González, *México y la OEA: Los debates diplomáticos, 1959-1964* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2006).

the dictates of the Estrada Doctrine. This doctrine dated to the 1930s and insisted that Mexico opposed the diplomatic practice in which existing governments decided whether to recognize new ones in other countries. Foreign Minister Genaro Estrada (1930-1932) argued that the denial of recognition represented interference in the internal affairs of other states. Accordingly, Mexico would limit itself to maintaining or retiring its representatives without opining on the character of other governments.¹¹

A brief survey of Mexico's relations with new regimes challenges the claim that it does not use diplomatic recognition as a political tool. For example, the Mexican government severed relations with Spain on January 1, 1940, and never recognized Francisco Franco's regime. The Mexican government waited until 1972 to establish relations with the People's Republic of China and until 1994 to recognize South Africa.¹² In these cases, Mexican leaders decided to delay or deny recognition for political reasons, demonstrating that they did not automatically follow the Estrada Doctrine.

The rest of the literature on Mexican foreign policy also tends to focus on external and ideological influences. Mario Ojeda and Lorenzo Meyer, among others, have argued that Mexico's place in the international system determined its foreign policy in the decade after the Cuban Revolution. They postulate that Mexican leaders' fear of the United States and its ability to apply political and economic pressure drove policy

¹¹ On the Estrada Doctrine, see Santiago Roel García, ed., *Genaro Estrada: Diplomático y escritor* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1978); César Sepúlveda, ed., *Terminología usual en las relaciones internacionales* (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1993).

¹² Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de México, "Embajadores de México," http://www.sre.gob.mx/acervo/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=346 (accessed February 21, 2012).

decisions.¹³ A few analyses have contended that sentiments of revolutionary or post-colonial solidarity linked the Mexican and Cuban governments.¹⁴

Those scholars who do examine the role of internal influences have underestimated their importance. Olga Pellicer and Ana Covarrubias have argued that international, ideological, and domestic concerns contributed equally to the formation of Mexico's relations with Cuba. While they devote more attention than most scholars to the influence of the domestic Left, they ultimately conclude that the Mexican defenders of the Cuban cause were too few and too divided to have a decisive impact on their country's foreign policy.¹⁵ Jorge Chabat has recognized the internal utility of Mexico's policy toward Cuba, but denies that domestic activism shaped foreign policy.¹⁶ Jürgen

¹³ Mario Ojeda, *Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1976); Mario Ojeda, *México y Cuba revolucionaria: Cincuenta años de relación*, 1st ed. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2008); Lorenzo Meyer, *La segunda muerte de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y arena, 1992); Lorenzo Meyer, "México y la soberanía relativa. El vaivén de los alcances y los límites," *Foro Internacional* 48, no. 4 (194) (October 1, 2008): 765-784. See also Arthur K. Smith, "Mexico and the Cuban Revolution: Foreign Policy-Making in Mexico Under President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964)" (PhD diss., Cornell, 1970); Couturier, "Mexico."

¹⁴ Soledad Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México. La querrela escolar, 1959-1963* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1988); Christopher M. White, *Creating a Third World: Mexico, Cuba, and the United States During the Castro Era* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Olga Pellicer de Brody, *México y la revolución cubana* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1972); Ana Covarrubias-Velasco, "Mexican-Cuban Relations, 1959-1988" (Phd diss., Oxford, 1994); Ana Covarrubias-Velasco, "Cuba and Mexico: A Case for Mutual Non-Intervention," *Cuban Studies* 26 (1996): 121-141.

¹⁶ Jorge Chabat, "Condicionantes del activismo de la política exterior mexicana (1960-1985)," in *Fundamentos y prioridades de la política exterior de México*, ed. Humberto Garza Elizondo (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1986), 89-114.

For other examples of analyses that consider but do not emphasize domestic factors, see Jorge I. Domínguez and Juan Lindau, "The Primacy of Politics: Comparing the Foreign Policies of Cuba and Mexico," *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique* 5, no. 1 (1984): 75-101; Mauricio Reyes, "Política interna y política exterior en México desde 1950 hasta 1964," in *Fundamentos y prioridades de la política exterior de México*, ed. Humberto Garza Elizondo (Mexico City:

Buchenau discusses domestic influences on the decision to maintain relations with Cuba, yet argues that the most important factor was Mexican leaders' desire to protect their independence from the United States.¹⁷

This dissertation argues that Mexico's domestic politics shaped its foreign relations while external influences played only a secondary role. Even the international context of the Cold War influenced Mexican leaders' decisions through the filter of internal considerations. This was the period, after all, when militaries across Latin America intensified their focus on domestic threats and counter-insurgency warfare under the so-called "national security doctrine."¹⁸ In addition, government leaders in the 1960s had to find strategies to manage the emergence of the New Left.¹⁹ The interrelated intensification of the Cold War and the rise of the New Left combined to create a climate

El Colegio de México, 1986), 135-166; Adolfo Leyva de Varona, "Cuban-Mexican Relations During the Castro Era: A Historical Analysis" (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1994).

¹⁷ Jürgen Buchenau, "¿En defensa de una 'Cuba Libre'? México entre el nacionalismo cubano y la expansión de Estados Unidos," in *México y el Caribe: vínculos, intereses, región*, ed. Laura Muñoz Mata, vol. 2 (San Juan Mixcoac: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. Jose Maria Luis Mora, 2002), 221-250.

¹⁸ On counter-insurgency warfare and the national security doctrine in Latin America, see Jean-Louis Weil, José Comblin, and Judge Senese, *The Repressive State: The Brazilian "National Security Doctrine" and Latin America* (Toronto: Brazilian Studies, 1976); Michael McClintock, *Instruments of Statecraft: U.S. Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency, and Counter-Terrorism, 1940-1990* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); Martha Knisely Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Eric Zolov has proposed defining the Latin American New Left as a sensibility, a "movement of movements" that shared specific frames of reference, including support for the Cuban Revolution and opposition to U.S. imperialism. Eric Zolov, "Expanding Our Cultural Horizons: The Shift From an Old to a New Left in Latin America," *A contra corriente* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 47-73. On leftist politics, see also Staughton Lynd, "The New Left," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (March 1969): 64-72; Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

of fear among Mexican leaders, similar to the anticommunism prevalent in U.S. politics at the time.²⁰

The Mexican government's relatively stable, centralized character was not enough to dispel officials' fear of internal unrest. In the 1960's, Mexico's presidents exercised semi-authoritarian power over the country, and one of their greatest instruments of influence was the government-sponsored Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI). Beginning in 1929, every president of Mexico had been a member of this party.²¹ The PRI provided its candidates with political legitimacy under the symbolic mantle of the revolution, as well as the machinery for running campaigns and winning elections.²² In the wake of the Cuban Revolution, however, Mexico's institutional revolution began to suffer by comparison and authorities worried that their country's violent history could repeat itself.

²⁰ On anticommunism in the United States during the Cold War, see Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Free Press, 1995); John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace?: American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

²¹ This trend continued until the election of Vicente Fox in 2000 brought an end to one of the longest periods of single-party control in Latin American history.

²² Overviews of Mexico's political system include Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano: las posibilidades de cambio* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1972); Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Roderic A. Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Decline of Authoritarianism*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Elisa Servín, *La oposición política: Otra cara del siglo XX mexicano* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas : Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006); Gastón Martínez Rivera, *La lucha por la democracia en México* (Mexico City: Grupo Editorial Cenzontle, 2009).

Focusing on this national and international context of fear, the dissertation explores how perceptions of threat affect foreign and domestic politics. It asks: who or what did Mexican leaders believe to be the most significant dangers to their control over the country? How and why did they use their relations with Cuba to counter these perceived threats? While this is the first work on Mexican-Cuban relations to emphasize the gap between actual and perceived threats, the distinction is a recognized phenomenon in the literature on international relations. According to political scientist Klaus Knorr,

The crucial point is that a threat is usually not observable. It is a cognitive construct. But unless it is a product of psychopathology, this construct is derived from things which, in principle, can be observed--that is, the behavior of governments and the capabilities of states. Unfortunately, these observable realities rarely have unmistakable meaning. They are ambiguous.²³

Another expert on the subject, Robert Jervis, has argued that one of the most common misperceptions in international politics is the belief that the behavior of others is more centralized, organized, and coordinated than it actually is.²⁴

This project applies Knorr and Jervis's theories of threat perception to Mexico's international and domestic politics. Expanding upon their work, it argues that just as decision-makers construct perceptions of threat based on ambiguous observations of the behavior of governments and the capabilities of states, they likewise construct similar beliefs by observing domestic groups and individuals. Mexican leaders in the 1960s, like many others, overestimated the centralization, organization, and coordination of leftist

²³ Klaus Knorr, "Threat Perception," in *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems*, ed. Klaus Knorr (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976), 78-119, 84.

²⁴ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 319.

groups, and in so doing gave them more influence over policy than their actual numbers or resources logically should have afforded.

This argument also builds upon theoretical scholarship about the connections between foreign and domestic policy.²⁵ Robert D. Putnam observed more than two decades ago that scholars need to investigate “when” and “how” domestic politics become entangled with international relations.²⁶ Recently, Fredrik Logevall made a similar call for more studies of the “intermestic” dimensions of foreign policy.²⁷ This case study of the domestic influences on Mexico’s relations with Cuba helps fill the lacuna in the literature.

²⁵ See Henry A. Kissinger, “Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy,” *Daedalus* 95, no. 2 (Spring 1966): 503-529; James Rosenau, “Introduction,” in *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, ed. James Rosenau (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 1-10; James Rosenau, ed., *Linkage Politics: Essays on the Convergence of National and International Systems* (New York: Free Press, 1969); Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-51* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). Jeremi Suri has applied this theoretical work to the history of the Cold War in Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). For an application of these ideas in a general discussion of Latin American foreign policy, see Jennie K. Lincoln, “Introduction to Latin American Foreign Policies,” in *Latin American Foreign Policies: Global and Regional Dimensions*, ed. Jennie K. Lincoln and Elizabeth G. Ferris (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 3-18. For explanations of Mexican foreign policy that emphasize domestic influences, see Wolf Grabendorff, “La función interna de la política exterior mexicana,” *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 31/32 (October 1977): 94-96; Blanca Heredia, “La relación entre política interna y política exterior: Una definición conceptual: El caso de México,” in *Fundamentos y prioridades de la política exterior de México*, ed. Humberto Garza Elizondo (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1986), 135-166; Jürgen Buchenau, *In the Shadow of the Giant: The Making of Mexico’s Central America Policy, 1876-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

²⁶ Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (July 1988): 427-460.

²⁷ The term “intermestic” refers to the combination of international and domestic levels of analysis. Fredrik Logevall, “Politics and Foreign Relations,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1074-1078.

Additionally, this project builds on earlier scholarship on power dynamics between small and large countries. Robert Keohane and Bruce Jentleson have observed that U.S. alliances with weaker countries have at times “increased the leverage of the little in their dealings with the big.”²⁸ Scholars such as Robert McMahon and Zachary Karabell have studied other cases of U.S. relations with the wider world in which the so-called tail wagged the dog.²⁹ John Lewis Gaddis has argued that “third-worlders” adopted a number of methods to manipulate the Americans and the Soviets during the Cold War.³⁰ By studying how and why Mexican leaders influenced U.S. policy toward Mexico and Cuba, this project furthers the effort to understand power relations on the international level.

Recently declassified sources provide new evidence of the connection between Mexican leaders’ foreign policy and their perception of domestic threats. In 2002, the records of the Mexican Federal Police and the two most important intelligence organizations became available to researchers at the National Archives in Mexico City. This collection contains thousands of pages of reports on the activities of domestic groups and individuals that the agents of the Policía Federal, the Department of Federal Security (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, or DFS), and the General Department of

²⁸ Robert O. Keohane, “The Big Influence of Small Allies,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 2 (April 1, 1971): 161-182, 161; Bruce W. Jentleson, “American Commitments in the Third World: Theory vs. Practice,” *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (October 1, 1987): 667-704.

²⁹ Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Zachary Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946-1962* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

³⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Political and Social Investigations (Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, or IPS) submitted to their supervisors in the Ministry of the Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación).

The intelligence services served as Mexican leaders' eyes and ears. The older of the two main intelligence organizations, the IPS, originated with the end of the Mexican Revolution. President Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952) created the DFS in order to have an elite security service directly under his control. DFS agents received training in police work and professional comportment from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI. Alemán's successor, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958), moved the Department of Federal Security to the ministry of the interior, where it partially eclipsed the older Department of Political and Social Investigations. Agents from the two organizations frequently mirrored each other's work and competed for prominence.³¹

The reports from the Mexican security forces provide a unique window into policymakers' perceptions of threat. They contain the information that Mexican government leaders received about domestic dangers and reveal an alarmist picture of leftist activities. President López Mateos and his minister of the interior and successor, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, were cunning and intelligent leaders, but they were not omniscient.

³¹ On Mexico's intelligence organizations, see Sergio Aguayo, *1968: Los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998); Sergio Aguayo, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2001); Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, *Las nominas secretas de Gobernación* (Mexico City: LIMAC (Libertad de Información-México A.C.), 2004); Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México (1959-1985)* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007); Aaron Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). On the role of intelligence in the Cold War and the importance of intelligence in one-party states, see Christopher Andrew, "Intelligence in the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. II: Crises and Détente (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 417-437.

They had to make decisions based on the knowledge available to them at the time and the intelligence that they received shaped those decisions.³²

This project integrates the declassified security records with other Mexican, Cuban, and U.S. sources. Newspaper and magazine articles from all three countries inform the analysis, as do published memoirs and unpublished manuscripts. Documents from Mexico's foreign ministry (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, or SRE), the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson presidential libraries, and the U.S. National Archives provide insight as well. This multi-archival, multi-national approach proved necessary in order to construct a nuanced examination of Mexico's international and domestic politics.

The dissertation uses the concept of threat perception as an analytic and organizational tool. Each chapter considers a different potential source of danger to the Mexican regime in the context of the Cold War and the country's relations with Cuba. For the sake of clarity, it breaks the threats into the categories of individual, national, and international, even though these subjective categories may blend into one another throughout the course of the analysis.

The first chapter begins with a threat on the individual level: the most powerful former President of Mexico, General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). A veteran of the Mexican Revolution, Cárdenas was still extremely popular in the 1960s for his land-distribution policies and his expropriation of the foreign oil companies. Lázaro Cárdenas

³² Other recent works that use Mexico's intelligence records to examine policy decisions include: Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, *1968: Todos los culpables* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2008); Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico*.

proved to be one of Fidel Castro's most dedicated supporters. The first chapter of the dissertation analyzes both the press coverage and the secret intelligence about the former president's activities. It argues that Cárdenas's support for Castro drove his successors to maintain relations with Cuba.

The next three chapters consider threats on the national level, examining the domestic groups that Mexican leaders viewed as the greatest dangers to their regime. Chapter Two analyzes government officials' perceptions of legal forms of leftist activism. It looks at political and economic organizations, labor unions, the media, and electoral opposition. Chapter Three considers the more extreme, in some cases illegal, threats, including communist infiltration, subversion, and revolution. Chapter Four analyzes Mexican leaders' perceptions of student activism, devoting special attention to the 1968 student movement. This section of the dissertation argues that López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz considered leftist activism a very real danger and knew that maintaining relations with Cuba would curry favor among those menacing groups.

The final two chapters shift perspective to the international level. Chapter Five inverts the central question of the dissertation by investigating why Cuba maintained relations with Mexico. It integrates Cuban sources with U.S. and Mexican intelligence records to analyze the ways that Castro benefited from the relationship. It demonstrates that ties to Mexico gave Castro symbolic ammunition and aided his efforts to export revolution to the rest of the Americas. Chapter Six incorporates U.S. perspectives and sources, arguing that U.S. diplomats and leaders in Washington eventually approved of Mexico's policy toward Cuba. Their Mexican counterparts convinced them that relations

between the three countries were not a zero-sum game: what helped Castro could also benefit Mexico and the United States.

This examination of Mexico's relations with Cuba in the decade after the Cuban Revolution revises the literature on Mexican international and domestic politics. It brings domestic issues to the fore of the debate over Mexico's relations with Cuba, presenting new evidence to prove that internal concerns weighed more heavily in policymakers' minds than ideological or external considerations. Most importantly, it shows how individuals and small groups outside government circles affected major policy decisions.

Chapter One: Lázaro Cárdenas and the Cuban Revolution

Cardenismo is not a relic, nor a finished history lesson, but a live tendency, a current of ideas, actions and aspirations that presently runs through our country... a national current that embraces men and women from different periods... that can be characterized as the tendency to keep the spirit and the practice of the Mexican Revolution alive and militant.

--Enrique Ramírez y Ramírez, "Carta a los periódicos explicando la naturaleza del cardenismo." *El Popular*, September 24, 1957

On October 6, 1961, agents of the Department of Federal Security (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, or DFS) observed as six thousand peasants congregated in Torreón, Coahuila, to listen to General Lázaro Cárdenas speak. The campesinos pressed in around the former president's improvised podium, reaching out to touch their hero's hand. Cárdenas had gathered his followers to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the division of the La Laguna haciendas in the Comarca Lagunera, a territory straddling the states of Coahuila and Durango. After Cárdenas spoke, the enthusiastic campesinos surrounded him and practically carried him back to his hotel.¹ A magazine article contrasted the atmosphere of exaltation at Cárdenas's celebration with the tepid response and low attendance—two or three hundred people—at the concurrent government-sponsored commemoration of the same occasion. According to the reporter, a campesino

¹ Ricardo Condell Gómez, "[Cárdenas leads campesino demonstration]," October 6, 1961, Dirección Federal de Seguridad [hereafter DFS], Exp 100-6-3-61, Leg. 2, Hoja 39, AGN.) *Note: Many of the intelligence documents do not have titles; descriptive titles in English are provided and bracketed for organizational purposes.*

at Cárdenas's gathering had remarked that he had passed up the government's offer of ten pesos to attend its event: "Better that I receive nothing and go to greet Don Lázaro."²

General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, President of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, was still one of the most powerful political personalities in the country twenty years after he left office. According to historian Enrique Krauze, "as Cárdenas's presidency faded into history, his reputation and prestige grew... he became an icon, a kind of moral *Jefe Máximo*, the only true living Mexican Revolutionary."³ Newspapers still followed the ex-president's every move, as did the government's secret intelligence services. Though Cárdenas had tried to retire from the limelight after 1940, thousands of workers and campesinos remembered his efforts on their behalf. Nearly all Mexicans celebrated his appropriation of the foreign-owned oil industry in 1938 as one of the major accomplishments of the Mexican Revolution. As historian Alan Knight has observed, Cárdenas was the most genuinely radical, or revolutionary, Mexican president of the twentieth century.⁴

Everyone in Mexico, from the president to foreign journalists, recognized Cárdenas's power. In 1960, President Adolfo López Mateos's administration bore testimony to the enduring importance of Cárdenas's nationalization of oil when it, in turn, nationalized the electric industry. According to *Time* magazine, López Mateos tried to

² "La Nación: El nombre prohibido," *Política*, October 15, 1961.

³ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 480.

⁴ Alan Knight, "Lázaro Cárdenas," in *Gobernantes mexicanos*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 179-208. There is a vast body of literature on Lázaro Cárdenas. Recent work includes: Adolfo Gilly, *Tres imágenes del General* (Mexico City: Taurus, 1997); Daniela Spenser and Bradley A. Levinson, "Review: Linking State and Society in Discourse and Action: Political and Cultural Studies of the Cárdenas Era in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 2 (January 1, 1999): 227-245; Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz, eds., *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

portray the move as the logical continuation of Cárdenas's policy and had posters hung across the country declaring: "Petroleum in 1938, Electricity in 1960."⁵ Polish-born journalist K.S. Karol published an interview with the former president in a Mexican magazine in 1961, calling him the "Joan of Arc and Robespierre of Mexico." He claimed: "Cárdenas represents a force of great weight in Mexican politics. Everyone in the country knows that... if he sends out a new call to the people, as on the 18th of March 1938, the entire nation will follow him."⁶

Much to the Mexican government's alarm, the "Sphinx of Jiquilpan" decided to start mobilizing his amassed power in 1959 as Fidel Castro inspired leftist movements across Latin America. Cárdenas, a native of Jiquilpan, Michoacán, had earned the evocative nickname when he decided to refrain from public involvement in affairs of state after his presidency. Castro's success, however, stirred the general to return to the front lines of the political battlefield in order to reinvigorate his own country's "institutionalized" revolution. This chapter analyzes Cárdenas's efforts to protect and spread Castro's revolution.

Mexican leaders kept a close watch on Lázaro Cárdenas through the press and the government's secret intelligence services, and the information that they received worried them. This chapter argues that Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz believed that Cárdenas posed a threat to their control over the country. They knew that the Cuban cause was close to the general's heart, and that knowledge presented them with both danger and opportunity. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz believed that they could either provoke Cárdenas by taking a hostile stance toward Cuba, or pacify him by defending

⁵ "México: El campeón de Castro," *Time Latin América*, May 12, 1961.

⁶ K.S. Karol, "El corazón del lado izquierdo," *Política*, October 15, 1961.

Castro's regime. They opted for the latter. As a result, the Mexican government maintained relations with Cuba throughout the tumultuous decade of the 1960s in large part because its leaders feared Lázaro Cárdenas.

EARLY ASSISTANCE TO THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Fidel Castro's group of revolutionaries received crucial assistance from Lázaro Cárdenas and others during their time in Mexico. The government's longstanding policy of welcoming foreign political refugees allowed Castro to meet other drifting rebels, including Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Mexican citizens and residents provided the Cubans with training, supplies, and housing. And when the police finally decided to shut down Castro's operation, Cárdenas interceded on behalf of the young, idealistic revolutionary.

Lázaro Cárdenas's first intervention with the Mexican government on Castro's behalf helped enable the success of the Cuban Revolution. At the end of June 1956, the ex-president read in the newspaper that Mexican police had arrested a group of Cuban exiles for plotting against Fulgencio Batista's government. "It is not strange," Cárdenas noted in his journal that evening, "that there is agitation in the heart of a nation like Cuba, which has seen bloody repression in recent years and that wants to be ruled by a non-military system."⁷

General Cárdenas decided to help Castro. In the month following the arrests, he had received requests from various acquaintances to intercede. On August 1, he visited President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines and convinced him to grant political asylum to the prisoners. The president had been considering extraditing the group to Cuba at Batista's

⁷ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Apuntes: Una selección* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003), 795.

urging, but instead agreed to Cárdenas's request. Officials released the group of revolutionaries, and the next day Fidel went to the ex-president to express his gratitude.⁸ Impressed with Castro's demeanor and dedication, Cárdenas described him in his journal as "a young intellectual of vehement temperament, with the blood of a fighter."⁹ The reprieve that Cárdenas obtained for Castro's group allowed them time to finish their preparations and launch their revolutionary expedition in the *Granma* from Mexico's shores.

Cárdenas's intercession with President Ruiz Cortines played a decisive part in rescuing Castro's revolution, but it was far from the only assistance that the group of Cubans received from the Mexican nation and its people during their years of exile. Throughout the twentieth century, Mexico maintained a tradition of accepting political refugees from other countries. Thousands of political exiles have fled there over the years, especially during Cárdenas's presidency and the Cold War. Mexico provided a new home for such luminaries as José Martí and Leon Trotsky, as well as for tens of thousands of Spanish Republican refugees, numerous U.S. writers, artists, and filmmakers, and exiles from Central America and the Southern Cone.¹⁰

The two most famous leaders of the Cuban Revolution first met during their exile in Mexico. Che Guevara fled to Mexico from Guatemala in 1954, when the U.S.-

⁸ "Se desistieron del ámparo, los 23 cubanos," *Excelsior*, August 3, 1956.

⁹ Cárdenas, *Apuntes: Una selección*, 803.

¹⁰ Alfonso Herrera Franyutti, *Martí en México: Recuerdos de una época* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1996); Robert Service, *Trotsky: A Biography* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Sebastiaan Faber, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1975* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002); Rebecca Mina Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); *México, país refugio: La experiencia de los exilios en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 2002).

organized coup overthrew the government of liberal reformer Jacobo Arbenz. Castro arrived a year later, in July 1955, after Batista freed him from prison in a general amnesty. Guevara was eager to meet Castro, having heard much about his revolutionary efforts from Antonio “Ñico” López Fernández, a participant in Castro’s July 26, 1953 assault on the Moncada barracks who had fled to Guatemala.¹¹ Mutual friends introduced the Argentine doctor and the Cuban lawyer soon after Castro’s arrival in Mexico, in the home of a Cuban woman whose Mexican husband was a *lucha libre* wrestler.¹² According to Hilda Gadea, Guevara’s wife at the time, the two men talked the night away upon first meeting each other.¹³

Two Mexican citizens proved critical to the preparation of Castro’s invasion, while another Mexican actually joined the *Granma* expedition. Arsacio Vanegas Arroyo, another *lucha libre* wrestler and printer whose grandfather had aided José Martí, was the first Mexican to align himself with Castro’s cause.¹⁴ Vanegas opened his home to the Cubans and helped Fidel print fundraising bonds and propaganda. The wrestler figured out how to smuggle Castro’s first manifesto into Cuba. Taking advantage of a commission to print *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Vanegas used the cover and some

¹¹ Hilda Gadea introduced Guevara to Ñico in Guatemala in January 1954. Hilda Gadea, *Ernesto: A Memoir of Che Guevara*, trans. Carmen Molina and Walter I. Bradbury (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), x.

¹² The term “lucha libre,” literally translated as “free fight,” refers to a style of masked wrestling popular in Mexico. Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹³ Gadea, *Ernesto: A Memoir of Che Guevara*, 99. See also Ignacio Ramonet and Fidel Castro, *Fidel Castro: My Life: A Spoken Autobiography*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Scribner, 2008).

¹⁴ Mario Mencía, “La insurrección cubana y su tránsito por México,” in *México y Cuba: Dos pueblos unidos en la historia*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Centro de Investigación Científica Jorge L. Tamayo, 1982), 279-301. Mencía tells Vanegas’s story on pages 289-290, and an annex to the book includes an interview with the luchador on pages 416-419.

illustrations from the classic novel and printed a “new” edition with Fidel’s manifesto camouflaged inside.¹⁵ He also trained Castro’s group in hand-to-hand combat in a gymnasium in the working-class neighborhood of Tepito and supervised their physical conditioning in long walks along the Avenida Insurgentes, rowing exercises on the Lake of Chapultepec, and hikes in the hills surrounding Mexico City.

Another Mexican, Antonio del Conde Pontones, also known as “El Cuate,” obtained many necessary supplies for the revolutionaries.¹⁶ Fidel bought most of his weapons from del Conde’s arms shop and eventually shared his plans with his “buddy.” Once aware of Castro’s quest, “El Cuate” traveled to the United States in order to obtain more weapons for the Cubans and made uniforms for them in a factory behind his shop. He also purchased the *Granma* for Fidel and watched from the shore as the overloaded yacht departed on its historic voyage.¹⁷

On board was another Mexican, Alfonso Guillén Zelaya, son of Honduran exiles and a member of the Mexican Socialist Youth group. Guillén happened to overhear Fidel giving a speech while strolling through Mexico City’s Park of Chapultepec and felt compelled to join the Cubans. At 20 the youngest member of the expedition, Guillén was captured and imprisoned when the *Granma* landed.¹⁸ Batista deported him to Mexico at the end of 1957, and Guillén continued to raise funds for Fidel’s movement.

¹⁵ Concepción Guillo Deza, “Cómo financió Castro la revolución cubana,” in *México y Cuba: Dos pueblos unidos en la historia*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Centro de Investigacion Cientifica Jorge L. Tamayo, 1982), 416-419.

¹⁶ “Cuate” is Mexican slang for friend or “buddy.”

¹⁷ *De Tuxpan a la Plata* (Havana: Editora Política, 1985), 40-42; Mencía, “La insurrección cubana y su tránsito por México,” 291-292.

¹⁸ *México y Cuba: Dos pueblos unidos en la historia*, vol. 2, 420-425.

Two Cubans who had spent decades living in Mexico also assisted Castro's efforts. Alberto Bayo Giroud, a native of Cuba who had fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War and then sought asylum in Mexico, provided Fidel's group with necessary military training. Drawing on his previous experiences in battle, Bayo taught the Cubans about guerrilla warfare, urban combat, and other topics.¹⁹

Teresa Casuso, a famous student activist in 1930s Cuba who had moved to Mexico in the 1940s, provided crucial aid to Castro's group. Casuso had read about Castro's 1956 arrest in Mexico City in the newspaper. Her New Year's resolution for that year had been to revive her spirits and fight for something, and Fidel's movement caught her attention.²⁰ She visited her countrymen in the immigration prison and, little aware of the consequences of her gesture, told Fidel that "her house was his." Two days later, the recently freed revolutionary awaited Casuso in her parlor; the next day he asked if he could store a few things in her house. Casuso agreed, and Fidel and his men returned with seven carloads of munitions—"a veritable arsenal."²¹ She also rented the house next door at Castro's urging. It became another arms depot, as well as a home for Pedro Miret, a Cuban comrade of Fidel's who came to Mexico to train the revolutionaries in the handling, care, and repair of weapons.

Teresa Casuso used her political connections to find powerful allies for Castro. She travelled to Miami to arrange a meeting between Fidel and her "dear friend," former president of Cuba Carlos Prío Socarrás. Castro went to the border at Brownsville, Texas,

¹⁹ *De Tuxpan a la Plata*, 39.

²⁰ Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro* (New York: Random House, 1961), 89-90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

and waded across the Rio Bravo to meet with Prío Socarrás. There, Prío agreed to help cover the expenses of Castro's movement, including the purchase of the *Granma*.²²

Casuso paid a high price for efforts on Castro's behalf. Mexican police arrested her, and she spent over three weeks in various Mexican jails. Casuso's landlord evicted her when she continued to host Cuban exiles who wanted to join the movement. After the revolution succeeded, she took charge of the Cuban embassy in Mexico City and arranged for the repatriation of six hundred Cuban exiles, including Alberto Bayo. Casuso moved back to Cuba for a time and accepted various posts in Castro's government. She soon became disillusioned, however, and sought asylum in the United States.

Teresa Casuso, Alberto Bayo, Alfonso Guillén, Antonio del Conde, Arsacio Vanegas, and Lázaro Cárdenas provided critical aid to Castro's revolution when it was at its weakest. They supplied housing, training, weapons, manpower, and political connections. This group of Cuban and Mexican allies helped see the Cuban Revolution through its early stages.

CÁRDENAS'S DEFENSE OF CASTRO

General Lázaro Cárdenas's efforts on Castro's behalf carried over from the preparation of his revolution to its consolidation. Castro's success inspired the former Mexican president to return to the international political stage after twenty years of working quietly in various government posts and on public works projects. Lázaro Cárdenas embraced the Cuban Revolution and defended it wholeheartedly.

²² Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Morrow, 1986), 366.

Cárdenas made some of his earliest public statements in support of the Cuban Revolution when he visited Havana on July 26, 1959, for the celebration of the anniversary of Castro's attack on the Moncada Barracks. Speaking in front of a crowd of thousands, including journalists from across the world, Cárdenas declared: "Faced with the campaign developed abroad by enemies of Cuba's revolution, authorized voices make themselves heard, asking for comprehension and moral support on her behalf."²³ The famous Mexican revolutionary general struck an impressive image as he stood shoulder to shoulder with his younger Cuban counterpart.

Cárdenas saw his own experience reflected in the Cuban Revolution. After leaving the 26th of July celebrations, the ex-president spoke at greater length about Cuba with Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska on the airplane back to their country. He explained his sympathy for the difficulties that the Cubans were encountering and reminisced about how Mexican revolutionaries had also faced animosity, criticism, and false accusations. "They are passing through the same thing that we did. We were also attacked... and accused of serving foreign governments."²⁴

Cárdenas had not forgotten the negative U.S. reaction to both the Mexican Revolution and to his nationalization of the oil industry in 1938. He saw the events of 1959 as a repetition: the same powerful bully trying to prevent a weaker neighbor from seizing a chance at political and economic liberation. When Cárdenas spoke in such a manner about Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, the Mexican nation—and government—listened.

²³ Lázaro Cárdenas, "Discurso con motivo del VI aniversario de la iniciación del movimiento revolucionario '26 de julio,'" in Lázaro Cárdenas, *Palabras y documentos públicos de Lázaro Cárdenas, 1928-1970*, n.d., 86.

²⁴ Elena Poniatowska, *Palabras cruzadas* (Mexico City: Editorial Era, 1961), 31.

Cárdenas took an even bolder step in his efforts to defend what he saw as Castro's liberation of Cuba in March 1961. He convened the Latin American Conference for National Sovereignty, Economic Emancipation, and Peace, also known as the "Latin American Peace Conference," in Mexico City. He and the other organizers intended the conference to draw international attention to the miserable conditions in Latin America, denounce the United States' imperialist activities in the region, and defend the Cuban Revolution (see Illustration 1.1). "We understand that the defense of Cuba is the defense of Latin America," the announcement of the peace conference declared.²⁵

The Latin American Peace Conference began in Mexico City on March 5, 1961. Over 2,500 delegates from twenty Latin American nations as well as Europe, Asia, and Africa crowded into an auditorium, and at least a thousand additional people listened to the proceedings on loudspeakers installed outside the building.²⁶ Many of the attendees were communists, but most were not. Journalists from across the world provided newspaper and television coverage. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Zhou Enlai, Premier of the People's Republic of China, sent telegrams congratulating the organizers on their efforts. Over the course of the four-day conference, delegates discussed the importance of international solidarity, proclaimed the right of the nations of Latin America to defend their sovereignty, and denounced the imperialist practices of the United States. The Cuban delegation frequently took center stage.

²⁵ "Convocatorio de la Conferencia Pro-Paz," *La Prensa*, January 28, 1961.

²⁶ Mexican newspaper *La Prensa* estimated the attendance inside the building at 2,500, while the magazine *Política* claimed three thousand. Manuel Arvizu, "Dió comienzo la junta de carácter pacifista," *La Prensa*, March 6, 1961; "Nuestra América se reúne," *Política*, March 15, 1961. Intelligence agents in the Dirección de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales stated that attendance never dropped below 1,500, while agents from the Dirección Federal de Seguridad reported that four thousand people fit inside the building for the opening ceremonies. "[Conferencia Pro-Paz documents]," March 1961, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales [hereafter IPS] Caja 1475-B, Exp 40-43, AGN. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Conferencia Pro-Paz", May 5, 1961, DFS, Exp. 11-6-61, Leg. 2, Hoja 311, AGN.



Image 1.1: A political cartoon of Fidel Castro praying to a picture of “Saint” Lázaro Cárdenas from the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, March 1961

Lázaro Cárdenas opened the events with a speech that set the tone for the rest of the conference. He denounced the dangers of imperialist war in the atomic age. He lauded the Cuban Revolution and praised the “incorruptible” Cuban leaders. He also expounded on the need for cooperation among the “less developed” nations to improve their economic standing. Cárdenas declared: “as long as there is one country without liberty, as long as we witness the existence of nations without political independence... it will not be possible for peace to prevail in the world.”²⁷ This statement became a mantra of the rest of the conference, as numerous speakers repeated Cárdenas’s message of international solidarity.

Vilma Espín gave a rousing speech about the liberation of the Cuban people at the opening ceremony. She had significant revolutionary credentials from working with Frank País, the urban coordinator of Castro’s movement, to help prepare the Cuban Revolution.²⁸ Upon País’s death, Espín took over command of the M26 urban organization, the second front of the rebel army in the island’s eastern cities. Less than a month after the success of the revolution, she married Raúl Castro and in August 1960 founded the Federation of Cuban Women, of which she served as president. In her speech at the Latin American Peace Conference, Espín compared Fidel Castro to Abraham Lincoln and said that the Cuban Revolution was an example to the world of the vulnerability of imperialism. She declared that although her country did not export revolutions, it was impossible to contain the power of the island’s example. Espín also expressed gratitude to the socialist nations and to Cuba’s “sister nations,” such as

²⁷ “Documentos de la Conferencia Latinoamericana por la Soberanía Nacional, la Emancipación Económica y la Paz,” *Política*, April 1, 1961.

²⁸ *Por siempre Vilma* (Havana: Editorial de la Mujer, 2008).

Mexico, for their “generous and uninterested help” in overcoming the stranglehold of the imperialists. She ended her speech with Fidel Castro’s slogan: “¡Patria o muerte! ¡Venceremos!”²⁹

Other delegates lent weight to Vilma Espín’s claims about the exemplary power of the Cuban Revolution. Argentine professor of engineering Alberto T. Casella, one of the co-presidents of the conference, called the Cuban experience an important lesson and inspiring example. The delegate from the Dominican Republic described Cuba as “the example and pride of Latin America” and said that he hoped that one day the socialist nations would offer the same support to his country. Ramón Danzós Palomino, a prominent Mexican agrarian leader, stated that all people and nations could benefit from studying the profound reforms undertaken by the Cubans. Mexican labor and socialist leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano ended his speech with the hope that “the light of the Cuban Revolution may illuminate all of America.”³⁰

Conference attendees vowed to follow the example of the Cuban Revolution and to defend Cuba from aggression. The delegates produced a final declaration, which Cárdenas read at the closing ceremony. “In energetically reaffirming that they will defend Cuba against all aggression,” the ex-president stated, “the Latin American people know that they defend their own destiny.”³¹ The final resolutions of the conference went into further detail on how to protect Cuba. They contained promises to fight all enemies of

²⁹ “Documentos de la Conferencia Latinoamericana por la Soberanía Nacional, la Emancipación Económica y la Paz.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Declaración de la Conferencia pro Soberanía,” *Excélsior*, March 9, 1961, sec. A. “North America” was common shorthand for the United States. References to “North America” very rarely included Mexico and Canada. “Yankee” was another popular substitute.

Castro's government—counterrevolutionaries, mercenaries, and North American imperialists—wherever they were found. The conference attendees also defended the Cuban people's rights to determine their own government and to seek and accept help from any country of the world.³² This assertion flew in the face of the United States' longstanding practice of playing kingmaker in Latin American politics. It also challenged U.S. efforts dating as far back as the Monroe Doctrine to keep European countries—in this case, the Soviet Union—out of the Americas.

Conference attendees devoted a similar amount of attention in their speeches and resolutions to the related theme of U.S. imperialism. Cárdenas's co-president of the conference, Alberto T. Casella, called attention to the contradiction between the United States' assumed right to expansion and the Latin American peoples' right to self-determination. "Yankee imperialism has returned to the most aggressive forms in its history in its relations with Latin America," Vicente Lombardo Toledano declared. The representative from Paraguay protested her country's "official and permanent intervention" in recent years by the U.S. State Department. The Peruvian delegate denounced his own nation's role as a "peon of Yankee imperialism."³³

Delegates accused the United States of a wide range of crimes, including economic exploitation, military intervention, territorial conquest, cultural penetration, and support of tyrants. The final declaration of the conference put it plainly: "The fundamental force that blocks the development of Latin America is North American imperialism." The declaration denounced the Monroe Doctrine, the Organization of

³² "Documentos de la Conferencia Latinoamericana por la Soberanía Nacional, la Emancipación Económica y la Paz."

³³ *Ibid.*

American States, and the United States' policies of hemispheric defense and Panamericanism. "North American imperialism has compromised Latin America in the politics of the Cold War," conference participants concluded.³⁴

While the subjects of Cuba and the United States dominated much of the delegates' attention at the Latin American Peace Conference, the assembly had other goals as well. Occupying center stage were such New Left concerns as anti-imperialism and the rejection of both capitalism and bureaucratic communism. But Old Left issues of labor and unions also received significant attention.³⁵ Attendees discussed economic topics like agrarian reform, nationalization, industrialization, lending practices, ownership of natural resources, workers' rights, and international cooperation. In addition, they made concrete proposals of ways to encourage world peace, such as abolishing nuclear weapons, limiting war propaganda, ending military pacts and aggressive alliances, and improving education.

Even when the conversations did not explicitly address Cuba or the United States, references to the two countries frequently colored the remarks. With regard to economic emancipation, delegates lauded Cuba's agrarian reforms and its nationalization of properties, industries, and resources. They denounced U.S. economic domination and the exploitive practices of North American monopolies, blaming the United States for Latin America's economic woes. The resolutions regarding national sovereignty referred exclusively to North American imperialism, omitting any mention of European or Soviet imperialism. When discussing the promotion of peace, attendees depicted the United

³⁴ "Declaración de la Conferencia pro Soberanía."

³⁵ On the distinction between the New and Old Left in the Latin American context, see Eric Zolov, "Expanding Our Cultural Horizons: The Shift From an Old to a New Left in Latin America," *A contra corriente* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 47-73.

States as the single greatest threat to world harmony. In every facet of the Latin American Peace Conference, the attendees made their loyalties clear in the escalating confrontation between the United States and Cuba.

At the end of the conference, Mexican intelligence agents took careful note as Cárdenas and the other delegates promised to spread all aspects of the Cuban Revolution in their own countries. The attendees pledged to invigorate the movements in support of Cuba and create new organizations where none existed. They also declared that “in the case of armed aggression against Cuba, all the people of Latin America would consider themselves likewise assaulted and would mobilize everything within their reach to combat the aggression.”³⁶

Cárdenas led some of the delegates in a week-long tour of Mexico after the conference’s closing ceremonies in order to convey his enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution to his followers, as well as to demonstrate to the government his intent to carry out the conference’s resolutions. Tour participants, including Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes and a number of Cuban visitors, travelled to the states of Querétaro, Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán. They held meetings and demonstrations attended by thousands of eager listeners. Fuentes described how in Pénjamo, Guanajuato, the “entire city emptied out into the plaza.” As Cárdenas descended from his vehicle, the schoolchildren, women, and campesinos shouted in a thousand voices, “Viva Cárdenas, who gave us land and freedom!”³⁷

³⁶ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Conferencia Pro-Paz,” March 8, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 3, Hoja 66, AGN.

³⁷ Carlos Fuentes, “Siete días con Lázaro Cárdenas,” *Política*, April 1, 1961.

General Cárdenas spoke of the successes of the Cuban Revolution, denounced U.S. imperialism, and criticized the conservative turn that the Mexican government had taken since his time in office. Carlos Fuentes wrote that the crowds listened fervently to Cárdenas's words and embraced his message. He quoted a campesino in Pénjamo, Guanajuato: "We do not read the press. We only know that in Cuba people are fighting for the same thing we have fought for here in Mexico and that they fight against the same exploiters. That is what we know." According to Fuentes, the mere mention of Cuba was enough to set off enthusiastic ovations and choruses of "Viva!" from the crowds. The writer described Cárdenas's tour as a "renaissance of the Mexican people."³⁸ The ex-president spread the energy and message of the conference to his followers across the country, connecting with areas outside the reach of the government-controlled press and inspiring admiration for the Cuban Revolution wherever he went.

Meanwhile, Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos was not an enthusiastic host to the Latin American Peace Conference. It came at a time when he was already struggling to keep leftist enthusiasm for Cuba from spreading. The Mexican government's claims to represent an institutionalized revolution suffered from comparison to the revolutionary nature of Castro's government. The fact that the hugely-popular Cárdenas, the last president with true revolutionary credentials, had thrown his weight behind Castro made López Mateos's job even harder.

President López Mateos did he everything he could to dampen the effects of the Latin American Peace Conference short of direct confrontation. He did not attend any part of the meeting, nor did he lend his name to any of the documents that it produced. Two months before the opening ceremonies, the president welcomed CIA chief Allen

³⁸ Ibid.

Dulles into his home for a frank conversation about Cuba, communism, and the Latin American Peace Conference. According to a CIA memorandum, López Mateos described the gathering as “a communist tool.”³⁹

The Mexican president saw the conference—and the issue of Cuba—as domestic threats. He explained to Dulles that U.S. officials could look at the “Cuban Communist problem” as a strictly international matter since there was little chance of Castroism having any effect within the United States. He claimed that in Mexico, on the other hand, Castroism was “a domestic political problem” because of a large body of sympathy for Castro and his revolution. Mexicans’ emotional identification with the Cuban Revolution, López Mateos claimed, “had to be weighed in all actions concerning Cuba.”⁴⁰ He added that he could take no overt action against Castro for that reason.

President López Mateos also refused to take overt action against Cárdenas’s peace conference. When Dulles asked why he did not prevent the gathering, López Mateos explained that as a result of his nation’s constitution he could not forbid it from being held in Mexico. The president did promise to do “whatever he could to help the CIA disrupt and hamper the conference.” He bragged that Mexico had “better facilities for coverage and control” than many other Latin American countries. At the end of the conversation, President López Mateos expressed his satisfaction with his country’s complete exchange of information with the CIA and thanked Dulles for his gift of a model pistol, calling it “precious.”⁴¹

³⁹ “[meeting between López Mateos and Dulles],” January 14, 1961, Record Group [hereafter RG] 263 CIA Miscellaneous Files JFK -M-7 (F1) to JFK -M-7 (F3) Box 6 . JFK-MISC 104-10310-10001, U.S. National Archives College Park.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

While López Mateos expressed his concerns in private, the president of the official government party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI), publicly dismissed Cárdenas's peace conference. In a meal with foreign journalists, Alfonso Corona del Rosal described the sectors represented at the meeting as "an absolute minority in Mexico." When asked about Cárdenas's role, the party spokesman stated: "I respect General Cárdenas as an ex-president of our party, but regarding his behavior in this congress I leave all judgment to what his own conscience dictates as a citizen and as a Mexican."⁴² By minimizing the conference to the press and implying that its chief organizer would have to answer to his conscience for his actions, Corona del Rosal attempted to limit its impact both in Mexico and abroad. Indeed, the PRI leader's statements might have been an element of President López Mateos's promises to "disrupt and hamper" the peace conference.

The three most important national newspapers in Mexico, *Excélsior*, *El Universal*, and *Novedades*, also played their part in minimizing the impact of the conference. *Excélsior* provided limited, disparaging coverage of the events. It produced three short articles about the conference on interior pages, and simultaneously ran an equal number of articles criticizing the assembly. Every time the author of the *Excélsior* articles described one of the speeches at the peace conference, he inserted either his own disagreement or referred to dissent among the attendees. He went so far as to claim that "the presence of the delegates from Cuba imposed upon the assembly the shadow of a

⁴² "El PRI anhela tener un rival poderoso, no importa si es de izquierda o derecha," *Excélsior*, March 10, 1961, sec. A.

totalitarian regime, a terrorist one at the margin of popular will, without elections, a ferocious dictatorship of communist stamp.”⁴³

Excelsior devoted more space to articles that criticized the Latin American Peace Conference or showed public opposition to the events than to coverage of the meeting itself. One article titled “They Ask [President Adolfo López Mateos] to Repudiate the Communist Meeting” contained the text of telegrams to the president from Cuban exiles denouncing the conference.⁴⁴ Another article, “Liberty for the Destroyers of Liberty,” criticized the Mexican government for “hosting at this moment a great meeting of communists to whom we concede complete liberty to destroy at their pleasure our rights and our liberties.”⁴⁵ Anti-communism of the McCarthy type was alive and well in Mexico.

Novedades condemned the conference with almost total silence, publishing only three short articles on the events, while the editors of *Universal* took a different approach and published lengthy criticisms of the meeting. An editorial in *Universal* called the conference seditious and accused it of disturbing public order and the rhythm of work in the nation. The article predicted that the “agitators” in attendance would use the occasion to “radiate separatist demagogy” and “encourage red infiltration of other countries of our Continent.”⁴⁶ *Universal* also reprinted critical editorials from newspapers in Peru and Argentina. One from Buenos Aires warned that the conference would stoke the coals of

⁴³ “Abrióse la junta izquierdista que convocó Cárdenas: Hubo que arrojar agua de colonia para disipar el olor de unas bombas,” *Excelsior*, March 6, 1961, sec. A.

⁴⁴ “Piden a ALM que repudie la junta izquierdista: Telegramas de varios grupos de cubanos en el exilio,” *Excelsior*, March 7, 1961, sec. A.

⁴⁵ Emilio Escobar, “Libertad a los destructores de la libertad,” *Excelsior*, March 7, 1961, sec. A.

⁴⁶ “En paz si quiere paz,” *El Universal*, March 3, 1961, sec. Editorial.

Soviet propaganda in Latin America and called the gathering “a decisive step by International Communism to destroy our America.”⁴⁷ Another from Lima proclaimed in its title: “Neither Castro nor Cárdenas Fools Anyone Any More.”⁴⁸

The three main newspaper chains also refused to print paid publicity for the peace conference, much to Lázaro Cárdenas’s disgust. In his personal journal, Cárdenas wrote in January 1961 that the organizers sent the program for the conference to *Excélsior* and *Novedades* to be printed as a paid advertisement. The secretary to the editor of *Novedades* promised to print the information, but the next day informed the conference organizers that the editing chief had ordered the suspension of the publication. Cárdenas remarked cynically: “So this is how the owners of newspapers such as *Novedades* and *Excélsior* honor freedom of the press.”⁴⁹ None of the three biggest newspaper chains ever published any of the documents produced by the conference.

It is impossible to know definitively the reasons for the negative reaction in the major Mexican newspapers to the Latin American Peace Conference. In light of President López Mateos’s promise to CIA chief Dulles, it is likely that the Mexican president instructed the press to treat the assembly with a combination of silence and condemnation. Journalists from the leftist magazine *Política* seemed to agree with the theory of a government-imposed blanket of silence. They reported learning that the major

⁴⁷ Alberto Daniel Faleroni, “Se realizará en México una conferencia que agitará los lemas políticos de Moscú,” *El Universal*, March 1, 1961, sec. Editorial.

⁴⁸ “Ni Castro ni Cárdenas engañan yá a nadie,” *El Universal*, March 8, 1961.

⁴⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, vol. 3 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986), 186.

press outlets had received orders from the private secretary to the Mexican president to publish nothing about the conference, neither in favor nor against it.⁵⁰

Cárdenas and the other organizers of the conference did not blame the Mexican government, however. In a meeting with the international press, Cárdenas stated that the pressures of “imperialism” were impeding the coverage of the major newspapers. Journalist Jorge Carrión reportedly said that the U.S. State Department spent more money silencing the press than the organizers had spent putting on the conference.⁵¹ Carlos Fuentes blamed the press themselves, accusing them of “criminally abstaining from informing the public.”⁵²

It is very likely that the conservative interests of the wealthy owners of the major newspapers coincided with those of the Mexican and US governments, and that the press was all too willing to limit coverage of the conference. An agreement based on shared interests rather than force is especially likely since the Mexican government’s control over the press, while significant, was not complete. Other newspapers and magazines such as *Política*, *La Prensa*, *El Popular*, *El Diario de México*, *El Diario de la Tarde*, *¡Siempre!*, and *El Fígaro* provided neutral or positive coverage of the conference. However, with the exception of *La Prensa*, these newspapers and magazines had a much smaller readership and circulation than *Excélsior*, *El Universal*, and *Novedades*.⁵³

⁵⁰ “Soberanía Nacional y Paz,” *Política*, March 1, 1961.

⁵¹ “[Conferencia Pro-Paz documents].”

⁵² “Nuestra América se Reúne.”

⁵³ On the press in Mexico, see Chapter Two of this dissertation and Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta: Los archivos prohibidos de la prensa y el poder* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2007); Carlos Monsiváis and Julio Scherer, *Tiempo de saber: Prensa y poder en México* (Nuevo Siglo Aguilar, 2003).

At the same time that the Mexican government was limiting the public's knowledge about the Latin American Peace Conference, it was collecting vast amounts of information for its own benefit. Agents from both the Department of Federal Security and the Department of Political and Social Investigations compiled hundreds of pages of reports on the events, which they submitted to Díaz Ordaz, the minister of the interior and López Mateos's top man on internal security matters. A fifteen-page memorandum composed by IPS agents illustrates the fear and hostility of Mexican government officials and security forces regarding the peace conference. The report stated that all of the foreign delegates were of the extreme left, and fervent followers of the Soviet Union, "red China," and Fidel Castro. The agents claimed that the Cuban government had contributed extremely large quantities of money to the financing of the conference, including a 150,000 peso payment from the Cuban ambassador in Mexico to conference organizers and unspecified "large sums" paid directly to Lázaro Cárdenas by a special emissary from Havana.⁵⁴

Intelligence agents portrayed the peace conference as a meeting of communists and other extreme leftists, coming together to plot revolution, subversion, and destruction. The authors of the IPS memorandum warned that the Cuban participants were encouraging subversion and revolution throughout Latin America. The report stated:

All the Cuban delegates—28 of whom arrived from Havana—in interviews sustained with foreign and Mexican delegates, exhorted them to work, each in his own country, to OVERTHROW governments of the bourgeoisie and substitute them with Fidel-style regimes. They all promised the moral and MATERIAL aid of Cuba. [emphasis in original]⁵⁵

⁵⁴ "[Conferencia Pro-Paz documents]."

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The file also included a summary of a so-called “Secret Agreement” signed by Lázaro Cárdenas and all the presidents of the various delegations. The conference leaders supposedly agreed to “the initiation of SABOTAGE ON A GRAND SCALE, ON A PERMANENT BASIS, IN EVERY COUNTRY OF LATIN AMERICA, AGAINST BUSINESSES, PROPERTIES AND GENERAL INTERESTS OF NORTHAMERICAN IMPERIALISM.”⁵⁶ According to the IPS report, the conference leaders did not in reality seek peaceful, non-violent ways to gain national sovereignty and economic emancipation.

What worried the writers of the memo even more than Cuban machinations, however, was the growing power of Lázaro Cárdenas. At least half of the IPS report was devoted to the general and his role in the proceedings, describing him as the “indisputable and undisputed” central figure of the conference. According to the IPS agents:

The Congress, in spite of the silence of the press and other media, WAS A HUGE SUCCESS. The figure of CÁRDENAS HAS NOW REACHED GIGANTIC PROPORTIONS... General Cárdenas IS CURRENTLY THE AUTHENTIC AND ONLY CHIEF OF THE PROGRESSIVE (COMMUNIST) ELEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA. [emphasis in original]⁵⁷

The writers of the report also speculated about Cárdenas’s plans to start a new political party in Mexico to rival the PRI. They said that the general had denied that possibility in statements made during the conference, but that a journalist close to him remarked that only six months earlier Cárdenas had been singing a different tune. According to the IPS agents, Lázaro Cárdenas was extremely powerful, popular, and dedicated to the “Fidelization of [Latin] America.”⁵⁸ They spared no ink in their efforts to elucidate the threat that the ex-president could pose to the Mexican government if he so wished.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

LÁZARO CÁRDENAS AND THE BAY OF PIGS INVASION

Little over a month after the close of the Latin American Peace Conference, the United States invasion at the Bay of Pigs prompted Lázaro Cárdenas to enact his resolution to defend the Cuban Revolution. On April 17, 1961, as U.S.-trained Cuban refugees attempted to land at the Bay of Pigs, Cárdenas and his wife drove to the airport in Mexico City to board a private plane to Cuba. Bad weather prevented them from taking off, and they postponed the flight until the following morning.⁵⁹ Cárdenas returned the next day, but soldiers surrounded his airplane.⁶⁰ President Adolfo López Mateos had given orders that no one be allowed to travel to Cuba during the invasion, and so prevented General Cárdenas from flying to the aid of his friend.

Furious, Cárdenas did not let López Mateos's travel restrictions stop him from defending Cuba against attack. The general went from the airport to the Zócalo—Mexico City's main plaza—where a crowd gathered to hear him rail against the invasion. The head of the DFS estimated that five to eight thousand people attended, while IPS agents put the number between forty and forty-five thousand.⁶¹ Writers for the leftist magazine *Política* claimed that seventy to eighty thousand people attended.⁶² Police tried to block the streets to keep everyone out of the plaza, but their efforts proved futile against the crush of thousands.

⁵⁹ “[Cárdenas tries to fly to Cuba during Bay of Pigs],” April 17, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 167, AGN.

⁶⁰ Luís Suárez, *Cárdenas: Retrato inédito, testimonios de Amalia Solorzano de Cárdenas y nuevos documentos* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1987). Cárdenas's wife describes the events surrounding the Bay of Pigs in pages 214-216.

⁶¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[Cárdenas and students protest Bay of Pigs],” April 18, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 168, AGN. “Mitin Estudiantil”, April 18, 1961, IPS Caja 1980 B, AGN.

⁶² “El país, con Cuba,” *Política*, May 1, 1961.

Cárdenas's presence and words captivated the crowd. They swarmed around him, reaching out to touch his hand. The ex-president improvised a podium by standing on the roof of a car, and everyone in the plaza sat silently on the ground so they could see and hear him. Cárdenas told his audience that Cuba needed their moral support and that if all the people of Latin America united to help the island, there would be nothing the United States could do. According to an article in *Excélsior*, a cry of "a new party!" arose from the crowd, and Cárdenas responded: "You will have it when you find yourself equal to your people."⁶³

Cárdenas's denunciation of the Bay of Pigs invasion reached beyond the Zócalo. He sent a scathing message condemning the U.S. actions to a wide range of international institutions and leaders, including the United Nations, the presidents of numerous countries, and Walter Lippman of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Cárdenas declared:

We energetically protest the attacks that the people of Cuba are suffering by air and by sea and we call upon all the governments and people of Latin America and upon the very same people and government of the United States, as well as those of other peace-loving continents, to impede the aggression that our brother nation of Cuba is suffering.⁶⁴

The ex-president made even more inflammatory statements to the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina. He swore that if the government continued to deny him permission to fly to Cuba, he would go instead to the Mexican interior to organize all manner of activities in support of the Cuban Revolution.⁶⁵

⁶³ "Cárdenas defendió a Fidel Castro anoche, en un mítin en el Zócalo: Aquí hubo orden, pero en Morelia y Guadalajara ocurrieron disturbios," *Excélsior*, April 19, 1961.

⁶⁴ Lázaro Cárdenas, "[Cárdenas's message to the United Nations about Cuba]," April 17, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 165, AGN.

⁶⁵ "Luchará Cárdenas en Cuba ó en México," *Revolución*, April 20, 1961.

President López Mateos was not ignorant of Cárdenas's actions. Intelligence agents collected copies of his declaration and newspaper clippings about the protest in the Zócalo. They also maintained a round-the-clock watch outside Cárdenas's house and submitted extensive reports about his activities during the Bay of Pigs invasion.⁶⁶ The president also knew of students' desires to follow Cárdenas's example and go to Cuba in aid of their brothers in revolution. According to the director of the Department of Federal Security, an organization called the Student Front in Defense of the Cuban Revolution had recruited over one thousand members to form a brigade to send to the island. The intelligence agent claimed that Lázaro Cárdenas instructed the leaders of the student group.⁶⁷ López Mateos, as he had done with the ex-president himself, denied permission to all of Cárdenas's followers who wanted to go to Cuba. He invoked his policy of non-intervention and threatened to revoke the citizenship of anyone who "lent his services to a foreign government without permission from Congress."⁶⁸

López Mateos was not pleased with Cárdenas's response to the Bay of Pigs invasion. He invited the ex-president to meet privately with him on April 28, after most of the passions and drama had subsided. According to Cárdenas's description of the meeting, López Mateos told him that he was worried by the ex-president's announcement about planning to fly to Cuba. "Mexico is passing through a difficult situation right now; the revenue from tourism has dropped. The campaign abroad is very intense and it appears to me that we are borrowing other people's troubles," the president told

⁶⁶ Ruben Fernández Millan, "[vigilance outside of Cárdenas's house during Bay of Pigs]," April 17, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, Leg. 2, Hoja 166, AGN.

⁶⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[student protests against Bay of Pigs invasion]," April 19, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, Leg. 2, Hoja 172, AGN.

⁶⁸ "Ningún mexicano podrá ir a pelear," *Excélsior*, April 19, 1961.

Cárdenas.⁶⁹ The general responded with a reference to national hero Benito Juárez, who had resisted France's occupation of Mexico in the nineteenth century, warning López Mateos not to compromise the country for the sake of gaining mere loans.⁷⁰ Annoyed, the president replied that these were different times.

When Cárdenas still refused to agree about the importance of staying on the North Americans' good side, López Mateos revealed another concern. The president snapped out: "they say that the communists are enclosing you in a dangerous web."⁷¹ Eventually the conversation moved to less controversial topics, and the two men discussed ways to cooperate on future projects. If Cárdenas's account is accurate, then his confrontation with López Mateos indicates that the president was worried about a number of issues: Cárdenas's activism, communist influence, and economic repercussions from the United States.

THE DANGER OF PROVOKING THE SPHINX'S WRATH

By the time that President López Mateos met with Lázaro Cárdenas after the Bay of Pigs invasion, he had plenty of reasons to fear the general. Their conversation did little to assuage his suspicions, and throughout the course of his administration the president heard from his intelligence agents, the press, former presidents, anonymous citizens, and even from the ex-president himself that Lázaro Cárdenas posed a serious threat to the government's control over the country.

⁶⁹ Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, vol. 3 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1986) 212-216.

⁷⁰ On Benito Juárez, see Moisés González Navarro, *Benito Juárez* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2006); Brian R. Hamnett, *Juárez* (London: Longman, 1994).

⁷¹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, vol. 3, 212-216.

Cárdenas's own public statements gave rise to one of the government's greatest fears—that he might lead his followers in a new revolution. On June 6, 1960, Cárdenas presided over a gathering of small business owners and campesinos in Apatzingán, Michoacán, to protest the “monopolistic” practices of U.S. businessman and local landowner William O. Jenkins.⁷² The North American capitalist symbolized, in the ex-president's eyes, the betrayal of the Mexican Revolution to imperialist, foreign interests. According to a front-page article in the next day's edition of *Excélsior*, Cárdenas declared amid the enthusiastic applause of his audience: "Mexico is not exempt from a revolution."⁷³

Cárdenas's words to a small crowd in a local schoolhouse produced a powerful impact across the country. The secretary-general of the national agrarian union, the National Campesino Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina, or CNC), responded a little over a week later at the group's yearly convention. “We do not purport to correct our agricultural deficiencies by organizing a new revolution,” he stated.⁷⁴ At the same meeting the president of the PRI denounced the *vendepatrias*—traitors—who misunderstood the meaning of the Mexican Revolution. Many of those present interpreted his remark as a thinly veiled attack against Cárdenas.

Cárdenas's statement provoked such a strong and immediate response because it directly contradicted the Mexican government's central justification for its continuation in power. The state claimed that it *was* the Mexican Revolution in an institutionalized,

⁷² For more about Jenkins's role in Mexican politics, see Andrew Paxman, “William Jenkins, Business Elites, and the Evolution of the Mexican State: 1910-1960” (PhD diss.: University of Texas, 2008).

⁷³ Eliseo Ibañez Gonzalez, “Cárdenas clamó contra latifundio y monopolio,” *Excélsior*, June 8, 1960.

⁷⁴ “Agrarismo: Una nueva revolución?,” *Política*, July 1, 1960.

rationalized form. Now Cárdenas was suggesting that simply maintaining the old revolution was not enough.

Mexican citizens led President López Mateos to believe that Cárdenas's heated remark about a new revolution might not have been an idle threat. Even before the ex-president made his declaration in Apatzingán, Mexican citizen Adalberto Pérez wrote a disquieting letter to López Mateos. He claimed that Cárdenas and the communists were receiving money from Fidel Castro and possessed the weapons necessary to overthrow the Mexican government.⁷⁵ A year later, the president received an anonymous letter warning him that Cárdenas was planning to betray him. The author of this rambling letter made cryptic allusions to brainwashing and atomic radiation and begged López Mateos not to trust Cárdenas or go to the Soviet Union.⁷⁶

Conservative political groups echoed these warnings about Cárdenas's subversive exploits. The president of the National Anticommunist Party filed a complaint with the office of the general prosecutor (Procuraduría) in late March 1961, accusing Cárdenas of treason. He claimed that the ex-president convened a gathering in Uruapán, Michoacán, on March 18 to celebrate the anniversary of his nationalization of the oil industry. Cárdenas reportedly encouraged the crowd to overthrow the government and implant a totalitarian communist regime following the example of such countries as Russia, China, and Cuba.⁷⁷ Cárdenas had indeed been in Uruapán on March 18 to celebrate the occasion

⁷⁵ Adalberto Pérez, “[letter to López Mateos warning about Cárdenas],” May 15, 1960, ALM 704.11/13, AGN.

⁷⁶ Anonymous, “[letter to López Mateos about Cárdenas and the Soviet Union],” May 20, 1961, ALM 559.1/2, AGN.

⁷⁷ “Consignación del General Cárdenas a la Procuraduría,” *Excelsior*, March 27, 1961.

as part of his peace conference tour. The anticommunist leader's accusation, while far-fetched, was not completely baseless.

Other conservative leaders warned the president that Cárdenas was undertaking subversive activities and planning a violent, Cuban-style revolution. Agustín Navarro Vázquez, the director of the Institute of Social and Economic Investigations and a conservative ideologue, published an article describing Cárdenas's efforts to start a new revolution. He claimed that the general traveled to Europe to receive instructions from communist leaders on how to facilitate the Soviet Union's conquest of Latin America. According to Navarro Vázquez, Cárdenas was on the warpath and determined to "incorporate Mexico into Castro-communism" and "raise the banner of armed warfare not just in Mexico, but all of Latin America."⁷⁸ Leaders of the National Action Party (Partido de Acción Nacional, or PAN) and the National Synarchist Union (Unión Nacional Sinarquista) asserted that Cárdenas was connected to violent demonstrations across Mexico. They also claimed that during a trip to the Yucatan Peninsula, the ex-president had been assembling discontented farm laborers and conducting meetings in isolated fields with planeloads of Cuban revolutionaries.⁷⁹

Another former president of Mexico, Emilio Portes Gil, added to the chorus when he publicized his misgivings about Cárdenas's activities. The two ex-presidents exchanged a series of heated letters in the national press in 1962 and 1963, beginning when Portes Gil accused the National Liberation Movement, to which Cárdenas belonged, of following orders from the Kremlin to deviate the course of the Mexican

⁷⁸ Agustín Navarro Vázquez, "Cárdenas ayer y hoy....," *Revista de Revistas*, December 17, 1961.

⁷⁹ Paul P. Kennedy, "Mexican Rightists Ask Inquiry on Cárdenas's Pro-Cuba Action," *New York Times*, May 29, 1961.

Revolution.⁸⁰ After Cárdenas published his own letter defending the liberation movement, Portes Gil responded by charging him with attacking the Mexican regime at the Latin American Peace Conference.⁸¹ An editorial in *Excélsior* the following day praised Portes Gil and claimed that the country was divided into two fronts:

the patriotic front, purely Mexican and constitutional, over which presides Dr. Adolfo López Mateos, possessing as its principle the ideology of the Mexican Revolution; and the communist front, over which, exactly as Portes Gil describes, Cárdenas reigns.⁸²

In a third and final letter, the ex-president called Cárdenas an instrument of international communism and accused him of trying to undermine the regime and stage a new revolution.⁸³

Even if President López Mateos did not put much store in unsolicited information from civilians and former presidents, he was receiving similar reports from his intelligence services that Cárdenas was organizing subversive activities across the country. On April 10, 1961, the head of the Department of Federal Security informed the minister of the interior that Cárdenas was planning a nation-wide protest against the government, to take place on May 1. According to the DFS report, the ex-president controlled a sector of the Mexican Communist Party and was encouraging his followers to demonstrate against the government during the International Workers' Day

⁸⁰ Emilio Portes Gil, "El cuarto informe presidencial y el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," *Política*, October 1, 1962. Reprinted from *El Universal*, 14 September 1962.

⁸¹ "Portes Gil pide a Lázaro Cárdenas que rectifique su actitud," *Ovaciones*, January 10, 1963.

⁸² "La carta de Portes Gil," *Excélsior*, January 11, 1963, sec. Editorial.

⁸³ Emilio Portes Gil, "Portes Gil lanza otra andanada de graves cargos a Cárdenas," *Ovaciones*, January 24, 1963, sec. Editorial.

celebrations.⁸⁴ The intelligence director claimed that Cárdenas was working with the leader of a dissident teacher's union to organize communist "elements" in the National Polytechnical Institute, the Normal Superior, and the National Teachers' School. These communist teachers and teachers-in-training would form a column in the Worker's Day parade and carry signs demanding the immediate release of political prisoners and the convocation of free elections for union leadership.

Reports of Cárdenas's subversive activities continued to arrive on the desks of López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz throughout the 1960s. In June 1961, the director of the intelligence services submitted a document titled, "Information Related to COMMUNISM," in which he claimed that "the members of the Mexican Peace Committee [the group that organized the 1961 peace conference], who are led by General Lázaro Cárdenas, plan to carry out a campaign in various States of the Republic, agitating various social sectors."⁸⁵ He went on to name Puebla, Jalisco, San Luís Potosí, Michoacán, and Baja California as targets of Cárdenas's communist agitation. The intelligence agent explained that most of the subversive acts were to consist of demonstrations and meetings protesting the actions of the United States, as per the agreements made during Cárdenas's peace conference.

Politically motivated violence and activism in prior months in many of the places mentioned in the report lent credence to the intelligence director's claims that Cárdenas was fomenting trouble. The city of Puebla experienced violent clashes between Castro's

⁸⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Cárdenas leading communist protest against government]," April 10, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 163, AGN.

⁸⁵ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Información relacionado al COMUNISMO", June 24, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 4, Hoja 52, AGN.

supporters and critics following the Bay of Pigs invasion.⁸⁶ Cárdenas had visited Jalisco and given a speech criticizing U.S. President John F. Kennedy in the tour he led after the peace conference.⁸⁷ After Cárdenas's visit, thousands of people, especially railroad workers, gathered in Guadalajara to protest the Bay of Pigs invasion while police repelled students who tried to attack the U.S. consulate. In Michoacán, hundreds of students from the Universidad Michoacana protested the invasion of Cuba. A crowd of students from the Colegio de San Nicolás de Hidalgo attacked and destroyed the Instituto Cultural Mexicano-Norteamericano in Morelia, and in Zamora a huge column of thousands of campesinos cheered for Cuba and Cárdenas. In Baja California, protestors held a large demonstration in Tijuana, and the police and army arrested over a hundred sympathizers of the Cuban Revolution.⁸⁸ These events reinforced the intelligence agents' claims that Lázaro Cárdenas could inspire mass mobilizations, especially when he spoke in defense of Cuba.

Intelligence agents' distrust of Cárdenas endured, and for years after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Mexican leaders continued to receive reports about the former president's subversive activities. Agents of the Federal Police (Policía Federal) informed the minister of the interior that leftist leaders were observed discussing instructions from Cárdenas to form a peasant army. According to the report, "General Lázaro Cárdenas had told [the leftist leaders] to form brigades of armed campesinos in all of the States of the Republic,

⁸⁶ "La nación: Y detrás de Puebla...?," *Política*, May 15, 1961.

⁸⁷ "Documentos de la Conferencia Latinoamericana por la Soberanía Nacional, la Emancipación Económica y la Paz," *Política*, April 1, 1961.

⁸⁸ For information on protests surrounding the Bay of Pigs invasion, see "El país, con Cuba;" Eric Zolov, "'Cuba sí, yanquis no!': el saqueo del Instituto Cultural México-Norteamericano en Morelia, Michoacán, 1961," in *Especios de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe*, ed. Daniela Spenser (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2004), 175-214.

as well as here in the Distrito Federal, so that at the necessary moment they can confront the Army and the Police.”⁸⁹ The police were unsure, however, whether Cárdenas’s followers had actually taken any measures to organize the peasant army.

Intelligence agents also alleged that Cárdenas cooperated with the Cubans and the Soviets in his subversive activities. In 1965, the head of the Department of Federal Security reported that General Cárdenas and other leftist leaders were using students in Michoacán to stir up agitation against the federal and state governments. The intelligence director claimed that various communist “elements” with indirect connections to Cárdenas had been seen holding meetings and had received instructions to travel around Mexico provoking unrest among students, teachers, workers, and campesinos. These communist student leaders reportedly obtained money from the Soviet and Cuban embassies, and many of them had travelled to Cuba and the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ This report and similar ones from multiple intelligence services conveyed the impression to López Mateos and his chief security administrator, Díaz Ordaz, that Cárdenas was willing and able to create a great deal of trouble if given the incentive.

CÁRDENAS’S ELECTORAL THREAT

Cárdenas not only threatened to start a new revolution: he also posed an electoral danger to the Mexican government. In the late 1950s, the PRI began to show signs of weakness. Political elites who had worked together under the umbrella of the government party began to polarize into two ideological extremes, the divisions fed by the

⁸⁹ Jefatura de Policía del DF Secretaría Particular, “[Lázaro Cárdenas organizing a peasant army],” September 6, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-6-63, Leg. 10, Hoja 264, AGN.

⁹⁰ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[student agitation in Michoacán],” March 26, 1965, DFS, Versión Pública de Lazaro Cardenas del Rio, Leg. 3, Hoja 180, AGN.

longstanding rivalry between Mexico's two most powerful ex-presidents, Lázaro Cárdenas and Miguel Alemán Valdés. Each of the former leaders represented a different vision of how the nation should develop, and each counted upon a significant number of followers. The two groups jockeyed for position within the PRI, trying in 1957 to influence President Ruiz Cortines's choice for his successor.⁹¹ Instead of negotiating with leaders of the factions, Ruiz Cortines ignored both groups and designated Adolfo López Mateos, a decision which some historians have argued only increased the instability within the government party and cemented the fissures between the rival camps.⁹²

López Mateos inherited a deeply divided party and was desperate to hold the governing coalition together. He began receiving reports that Cárdenas could pose a threat to the PRI's cohesion and the government's monopoly over electoral politics almost as soon as he entered office. In October 1959, agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations warned:

for tactical reasons (among others), the groups of the extreme left are divided principally in: the Mexican Communist Party, the Popular Party, the Mexican Workers and Peasants Party and the Workers' Front; but General Cárdenas... can unite the members of these groups in one single front at any moment that suits [him].⁹³

The report suggested that the ex-president had the power to unite numerous groups any time he wanted—what it left unsaid was that defense of the Cuban Revolution could be just the incentive that Cárdenas needed to prompt him to take action.

⁹¹ In post-revolutionary Mexico, the outgoing president would essentially choose his successor by designating the PRI's next presidential candidate in a secretive process known as *tapadismo* (covering up). Rubén Narváez, *La sucesión presidencial: Teoría y práctica del tapadismo*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Instituto Mexicano de Sociología Política, 1981).

⁹² Loaeza, *Clases medias y política en México*, 197.

⁹³ "General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río", October 14, 1959, IPS Caja 1993, AGN.

Another intelligence agent suggested in 1960 that Cárdenas had already begun forming a new political party. The DFS official reported: “It is rumored that General Lázaro Cárdenas is forming a Socialist Party and to that effect is writing the statutes and setting the dates for a constitutional Congress.”⁹⁴ He added that dissident members of the PRI, as well as labor leader and president of the Popular Party, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, were collaborating with the general. López Mateos knew that Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano each counted upon a significant number of followers; if the two leaders combined to form a new political party they could draw away the leftist members of the PRI and stage a legitimate electoral challenge.

An article in the Latin American edition of *Time* magazine created a nation-wide uproar by publishing similar allegations about Cárdenas’s political ambitions. The article, titled “Castro’s Champion,” claimed:

The most recent rumors swirling around Mexico say that Cárdenas is at the brink of organizing a new leftist Party to challenge the government ruled by the PRI. In his native state, Michoacán, five thousand campesinos staged a parade in his honor to demonstrate their support, and Cárdenas said: ‘I have every right to be in politics without damaging the authority of the president.’ Whether or not he creates a new party, he is sure to continue pressuring the government to leave Castro in peace.⁹⁵

The author of the article also alleged that Cárdenas had renounced his membership in the PRI shortly after López Mateos had prevented him from flying to Cuba’s aid during the Bay of Pigs invasion. This claim might have originated from Cárdenas’s earlier attempt to retire from the Mexican army in 1960.⁹⁶ The article described the ex-president as the

⁹⁴ Julio Couttolenc C., “[Cárdenas and Lombardo Toledano rumored to be starting a new Socialist party],” May 11, 1960, DFS, Exp 11-77-60, Leg. 1, Hoja 45, AGN.

⁹⁵ “México: El campeón de Castro.”

⁹⁶ Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, 3, 213.

“number one hero” of both Fidel Castro and the Mexican masses. It concluded that the Mexican government defended Cuba out of fear of Cárdenas.

López Mateos’s administration responded to the *Time* article immediately and angrily. The state-mouthpiece newspaper *El Nacional* ran an editorial on its front page titled “The Difficult Talent of Soiling Everything.” The editorial denied that the Mexican government supported Castro, that it feared Cárdenas or any other leftists, that López Mateos prevented the general from flying to Cuba (which, in fact, the president *had* done), and that personal sentiments of any nature dictated the Mexican government’s policy toward Cuba. The author of the editorial insisted, “It is principles, and only principles, which inspire Mexico’s conduct in the present case [of Cuba].”⁹⁷ The vehemence of the editorial suggests that the claims in the *Time* article hit a little too close to home.

The allegations made in *Time* and the intelligence reports about Cárdenas’s frustration with the PRI were, in fact, accurate. In December of 1963, the ex-president wrote in his journal: “Our country requires the formation of political parties with the autonomy to defend the free expression of ideas, the rights of unions, and the tolerance that is characteristic of a democratic regime.”⁹⁸ In an entry made shortly after the Cuban Revolution, Cárdenas also wrote of his dissatisfaction with the conservative turn of the Mexican government. “In order for Mexico to become an integrally revolutionary country, to attain that status, it must make the step from the current revolution to a socialist one.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “El difícil talento de ensuciarlo todo,” *El Nacional*, May 16, 1961.

⁹⁸ Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, 3, 399.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

Obviously, government leaders were not privy to Cárdenas's personal journal; they were, however, in close contact with the general and keenly aware of his actions. Intelligence agents read Cárdenas's mail and even wiretapped his telephone to listen to his private conversations.¹⁰⁰ They also maintained a close watch on his family members and friends. Cárdenas probably voiced his doubts about the Mexican political system through one of the many channels that the government monitored.

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz ordered their intelligence agents to bring them information about dangers to their government. They received a unanimous response: General Lázaro Cárdenas is powerful, beloved by the people, and capable of toppling the state through violence or electoral opposition. Government leaders knew that the general still commanded the loyalty of thousands of Mexican citizens, who would gather en masse to hear him speak. They knew that he saw his own revolutionary fervor reflected in Castro's actions, and that he would go to great lengths, even risk his own life, to defend the Cuban leader. In addition, they heard from numerous sources that Cárdenas was prepared to stage armed and electoral challenges to the government's authority.

Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz maintained their country's diplomatic relations with Cuba in part because they did not want to provoke Lázaro Cárdenas. López Mateos admitted as much to Allen Dulles, when he told the head of the CIA that he had

¹⁰⁰ Manuel Buendía, *La CIA en México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Océano, 1984). On Mexican intelligence agents' use of wiretapping, see Chapter Six of this dissertation and Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México (1959-1985)* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007); Sergio Aguayo, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2001).

to weigh Mexican sympathy for Castro in all decisions concerning Cuba. Mexico's presidents used their country's policy toward Cuba as a way to gain political capital with the man who posed the largest individual threat to their regime.

After the Mexican government refused to follow the 1964 decision of the Organization of American States and maintained relations with Cuba, Cárdenas offered his "most sincere congratulations" to López Mateos. "The government over which you preside with dignity... has sustained once again to the world the principles of non-intervention and respect," he told the president.¹⁰¹ In the following years, Cárdenas withdrew from the national limelight and reduced his involvement in politics. The ex-president's dedication to Castro's revolution was not the sole reason that the Mexican government maintained relations with Cuba, but it was a compelling one.

¹⁰¹ "Unidad nacional," *Política*, August 1, 1964.

Chapter 2: The Danger of the Domestic Left

“Our development requires internal unity.”

*--President Adolfo López Mateos,
State of the Union Address, September 1, 1963*

*“A fissure in the solid integrity of our nation could
be excessively dangerous.”*

*-- President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz,
State of the Union Address, September 1, 1968*

On December 11, 1961, the head of the Department of Federal Security submitted a report to Minister of the Interior Gustavo Díaz Ordaz describing a meeting of the National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, or MLN), a new leftist umbrella organization formed earlier that year. The DFS director informed his supervisor that seventy members of the group had met to plan a demonstration in support of the Cuban government. The intelligence report included a direct quote from one member of the movement on the subject of Mexico’s relations with Cuba: “The National Liberation Movement will always be on the side of the policy of the regime, if and only if it is just, as in the case of non-intervention with Cuba; and [we] will criticize the government when [we] do not agree with national policy, without fear of retaliation.”¹

The MLN member’s statement conveyed both a promise and a threat. He had declared that his group’s loyalty to the government was conditional. The Mexican state could earn the National Liberation Movement’s support by pursuing favorable policies, or it could lose its allegiance and face the consequences if it did not. Retaliation would not frighten or deter the MLN, he claimed; only through worthy policies could the

¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento de Liberación Nacional,” December 11, 1961, DFS, Exp. 11-6-61, Leg. 5, Hoja 272, AGN.

government maintain the loyalty and cooperation of the nation's citizens. He even specified one of the policy issues closest to the hearts of the leftist group's members—Mexico's relations with Cuba.

The offhand comment to an assembly of fewer than a hundred people could have been insignificant, but Mexican leaders in the decade after the Cuban Revolution were anxious about the leftist threat to national security and liable to jump at shadows. They had seen the effects of political activism in Cuba and in their own national territory fifty years earlier. President Adolfo López Mateos and his minister of the interior and successor, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, had to make policy decisions based on the knowledge available. They collected information from their intelligence agents, from the press, from military officials, and from other government functionaries. Their sources sent a consistent, alarming message: leftist groups were ready and able to jeopardize their control over the country.

López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz maintained relations with Cuba in order to defuse the threat of leftist activism. They saw danger in the formation of the National Liberation Movement, an umbrella organization that emerged from Lázaro Cárdenas's 1961 Latin American Peace Conference and aimed to unite all of Mexico's leftist groups and individuals.² Mexican leaders also feared leftist challenges to their control over campesinos, workers, the media, and elections. All of these groups and movements sought to change the status quo, and all of them drew inspiration from the Cuban Revolution (see Image 2.1). By maintaining relations with Cuba, the Mexican government was able to curry favor with all the various leftist groups at once.

² On the peace conference, see Chapter One of this dissertation.



Image 2.1: A political cartoon contrasting the New Left's call for action (symbolized and inspired by Fidel Castro) and the Old Left's preference for reflection. Source: *Política*, February 1966.

LEFTIST COOPERATION: THE NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT

One of Mexican leaders' greatest fears was that leftist groups would amass their power by creating a united organization independent of government control. Prior to the 1960s, the domestic Left was divided into numerous groups that engaged in more competition than cooperation. The Popular Socialist Party, the Mexican Communist Party, the communist offshoot Mexican Worker and Peasant Party, and the Trotskyite Revolutionary Workers Party all jostled for position on the left wing of the political scene.³ The only officially recognized leftist electoral party was the Popular Party (or the Popular Socialist Party after 1960), whose leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano toed the government line on important issues in exchange for bribes and political office.⁴

López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz did not want to give leftist groups a cause to unite and knew that defense of the Cuban Revolution could be a rallying cry. As they watched over the 1961 Latin American Peace Conference in their own capital city, Mexican leaders heard people from across the country and hemisphere vow to work together to protect Castro's regime. Government agents, who monitored all national press, probably told Díaz Ordaz about an editorial in the premier leftist magazine *Política* that maintained: "the defense of the Cuban Revolution can be... a catalyst that integrates in one block all the groups of the left."⁵ During the Cuban Missile Crisis, a report from the

³ On the relationship between the communist and socialist parties in Mexico, see Chapter Three of this dissertation and Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

⁴ In 1962, President López Mateos's secretary called Lombardo Toledano to tell him that the government had instructed the Banco Hipotecario to cover the cost of his house. "[Conversation between Lombardo Toledano and Miranda Fonseca]," January 10, 1962, IPS Caja 2894, Exp. 1, AGN. Two years later in the 1964 elections, Lombardo Toledano and his Popular Socialist Party supported the official presidential candidate, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (who was decidedly *not* a socialist), and government leaders rewarded Lombardo Toledano with a congressional seat.

⁵ José Felipe Pardiñas, "Izquierda desatinada," *Política*, March 15, 1962.

head of the DFS suggested that the *Política* editorial had proved prophetic: Mexican Communist Party leaders were meeting with Vicente Lombardo Toledano to organize a protest of the blockade that would bring together communists, socialists, unionized workers, and students.⁶

Government leaders' fears of leftist cooperation began to materialize with the formation of the National Liberation Movement in 1961. Participants in the peace conference, including ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, formed the MLN in order to enact the conference's resolutions. Their goals encompassed electoral transformation, rejection of North American imperialism, liberation of political prisoners, economic emancipation of campesinos and workers, and defense of the Cuban Revolution. Nearly two hundred founding members from across the country met in Mexico City in August 1961, where they formed a national committee and agreed to a program of action. The directors of the MLN included "New" and "Old" leftists from all walks of life, including Lázaro Cárdenas's son, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and writer Carlos Fuentes.

Just as the government feared, the members of the National Liberation Movement worked to unite all leftist groups in Mexico under the umbrella of their organization. They reached out to intellectuals, campesinos, workers, students, artists, communists, socialists, and moderates, organizing into local committees across the country. They held educational sessions and demonstrations, distributed pamphlets, hung posters, and published a magazine. One year after the formation of the MLN, an intelligence agent reported that the group had more than sixty thousand members distributed in 230 local

⁶ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Leftist protest of Cuban Missile Crisis]," October 25, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-2-62, Leg. 10, Hoja 239, AGN.

committees across the country.⁷ The head of the movement, Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, claimed that the MLN had more than three hundred thousand members in six hundred committees.⁸

However, the National Liberation Movement's greatest claim to power was not its numbers, but its leadership—especially that of Lázaro Cárdenas. The former president spoke at the founding meeting of the movement, exhorting the audience to unite and defend its interests in an organization that would help achieve the postulates of the Mexican Revolution.⁹ The leftist magazine *Política* published an interview with Cárdenas, in which he avowed: “I am in complete solidarity with the National Liberation Movement, and I will be as long as I live.”¹⁰ Cárdenas delivered the closing address before a thousand people at the MLN's first national convention in October 1963, declaring that the organization would take part in the civic battle to reform Mexico's electoral system. He also seized the opportunity to reiterate his support for “Cuba's glorious revolution.”¹¹

Cárdenas declared that he was a member of the movement, not a leader; but any level of association between the ex-president and the MLN was enough to attract affiliates.¹² Intelligence agents watched as more than eight hundred campesinos and

⁷ Hector Fierro García, “[MLN meeting],” July 10, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 7, Hoja 178, AGN.

⁸ Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, interview by the author, February 24, 2010. See also Gastón Martínez Rivera, *La lucha por la democracia en México* (Mexico City: Grupo Editorial Cenzontle, 2009), 57.

⁹ “La nación: Liberación Nacional,” *Política*, August 15, 1961.

¹⁰ Roberto Blanco Moheno, “Comunista: Una palabra que no debe espantarnos,” *Siempre!*, December 13, 1961.

¹¹ “El MLN se reúne,” *Política*, October 15, 1963.

¹² Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[Cárdenas's connections to MLN],” January 21, 1963, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas, Leg. 3, Hoja 24, AGN.

workers gave Cárdenas a warm ovation when he spoke at the opening ceremonies of the MLN's regional assembly in Zamora, Michoacán.¹³ The director of the Department of Federal Security wrote a report about an MLN meeting in Mexico City in which a member described Cárdenas as the head of the organization. At the same meeting, a representative from Xochimilco attested: "General Lázaro Cárdenas instills us with courage, and we are at his orders."¹⁴

Security agents worried that Cárdenas would use his connections with the National Liberation Movement in order to create trouble for the government. Military intelligence reported that the general gave movement leaders in Baja California instructions for agitation.¹⁵ The intelligence director also claimed that the former president promised to aid a strike movement in a metal factory, on the condition that the union members join the MLN.¹⁶ Lázaro Cárdenas's relationship with the National Liberation Movement was thus mutually beneficial; his popularity attracted members and attention, and in return he gained the manpower necessary to push for the causes closest to his heart.

General Cárdenas had multiple conversations with President López Mateos about the National Liberation Movement. In October 1961, Cárdenas wrote in his journal that

¹³ "Don Lázaro habló en la asamblea del Movimiento de Liberación en Zamora," *La Voz de Michoacán*, May 29, 1962. See also Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Cárdenas's involvement with the MLN]," May 31, 1962, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas, Leg. 2, Hoja 336, AGN.

¹⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," December 3, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 5, Hoja 194, AGN.

¹⁵ General de Division Comandante Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, "Actividades del MLN en Baja California," July 1962, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 27, AGN.

¹⁶ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," December 19, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 6, Hoja 1, AGN.

toward the end of a meeting with the president he had raised the subject of police hostility toward MLN members in Jalisco. “From what do they seek liberation?” López Mateos inquired. Cárdenas tried to defend the group’s aims but confided to his journal that “in reality, Licenciado López Mateos does not sympathize with the organization.”¹⁷

The National Liberation Movement remained a bone of contention between the two men. At another meeting two months later, Cárdenas tried again to defend the MLN. He explained that the movement was neither a political party nor an enemy of López Mateos’s administration. Finally, the president gave his word that as long as the members of the movement stayed within the limits of the nation’s constitution, no one would bother them. “I hope so, Mr. President,” Cárdenas replied as he left.¹⁸

One of the causes that the National Liberation Movement shared with Lázaro Cárdenas was defense of the Cuban Revolution. Members of the movement led educational seminars about the achievements of the Cuban Revolution, held large celebrations to celebrate the anniversary of Castro’s attack on the Moncada Barracks every 26 of July, published manifestos and articles about Cuba, and organized rallies whenever Castro’s government came under verbal or physical attack. Intelligence agents attended these events and took photographs of MLN members hanging pro-Cuba posters in their offices.¹⁹ Shortly after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the National Liberation

¹⁷ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras: Apuntes 1957/1966*, vol. 3, 243-246.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN gathering in support of the Cuban Revolution],” November 15, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 9, Hoja 85, AGN; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[MLN conference about Cuba],” July 19, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-6-65, Leg. 14, Hoja 287, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN meeting about the Cuban Missile Crisis],” October 23, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 8, Hoja 243, AGN; “Elementos del MLN que forman parte del Comité Pro/Solidaridad con Cuba elaborando el periódico mural en el local que ocupa el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional,” October 10, 1961, DFS, Exp. 11-6-62, Leg. 6, Hoja 85, AGN.

Movement and numerous other leftist groups wrote a letter to López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz denouncing the police's repression of pro-Cuba activities. In the letter, they vowed: "Nothing will make our organizations and the people of Mexico retreat from their firm decision to continue fighting against the danger of war and for the sovereignty of the people of Cuba."²⁰

López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz felt threatened by the National Liberation Movement and called for heavy surveillance of MLN members and their activities. Intelligence agents monitored the movement's mail, telegrams, and telephones.²¹ They collected samples of the group's posters, fliers, press bulletins, and newspapers. They photographed the movement's offices and compiled biographical information about its leaders. They assembled lists of people who attended meetings or made financial contributions to the MLN.²² Other government functionaries aided the surveillance efforts: a member of Congress reported to Díaz Ordaz on the movement's activities, as did prominent employees of the Ministry of Defense.²³

Intelligence agents tried to bribe employees of the National Liberation Movement. In October 1962, officials of the Department of Federal Security went to the house of a typist for the movement. They offered to pay him twice his monthly wages from the

²⁰ "[MLN letter to López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz]," November 4, 1962, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 1, AGN.

²¹ For examples of surveillance, see DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg 6. More evidence of phone tapping is available in MLN leader Jorge L. Tamayo's letters to the DFS, in Jorge L. Tamayo, *Obras de Jorge L. Tamayo*, vol. 9: Cartas (Mexico City: Centro de Investigación Científica Jorge L. Tamayo, 1986).

²² "Personas que apoyan al MLN," November 14, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-6-63, Leg. 11, Hoja 143, AGN.

²³ Dip. Lic. Arturo Moguel Esponda, "Actividades del MLN," September 20, 1963, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 1, AGN; Francisco Ramírez Palacios, "Organización del MLN en Durango," October 11, 1961, IPS Caja 2964 C, AGN; General de División Comandante Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, "Informe sobre las actividades que ha desarrollado en la Entidad el Lic. Jorge Moreno Bonet, miembro destacado del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," February 2, 1963, IPS Caja 2963 A, AGN. Cuenca Díaz became Minister of Defense in 1970.

MLN for information. He answered evasively, saying he did not want to complicate his life, and the agents concluded that the typist was lazy and lacked ambition. They held out hope that with a little more work and persuasion, they could eventually convince him to spy on his employers. The agents resolved to continue cultivating their potential informant and following his activities.²⁴

Government leaders and their agents feared the National Liberation Movement because of both what it was and what it could do. It was the most successful effort in decades to unite leftist forces outside of government control. If the leftists worked in cooperation with each other, rather than competition, they could begin to undermine the government's power over campesinos, workers, information, and elections. They could foment subversion and rebellion. Government agents watched uneasily as members of the MLN and others began to take just such steps.

CAMPESINOS AND THE INDEPENDENT CAMPESINO CENTER

When leftist leaders associated with the National Liberation Movement began forming a new agrarian organization in 1963 called the Independent Campesino Center (Central Campesina Independiente, or CCI), they sparked a nation-wide uproar.²⁵ Ever since Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency, the peasantry had formed one of the main pillars of the government's power. Cárdenas had created the National Campesino Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina, or CNC) to institutionalize his extensive agrarian

²⁴ Juan Varas Buere and Luis Ramirez López, "Contacto con miembro del MLN," November 8, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 9, Hoja 71, AGN.

²⁵ Though the Independent Campesino Center was affiliated with the National Liberation Movement and many of the same people led both groups, it was not a tool of the movement, as many critics claimed at the time. "La Central Campesina Independiente y el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," *Política*, January 15, 1963.

reforms of the 1930s. The state-run union incorporated the peasantry into the PRI and the sphere of government control. Campesinos took their complaints and petitions to the CNC, which acted as the principal intermediary between them and the government. In return for occasional land grants and other favors, they voted for PRI candidates, attended political rallies, and refrained from political opposition.²⁶

The Independent Campesino Center attempted to reinvigorate the agrarian aims of the Mexican Revolution as exemplified by Cárdenas's presidency. In January 1963, more than a thousand people from across the country, claiming to represent five hundred thousand previously unaffiliated campesinos, gathered in Mexico City for the CCI's constitutional congress.²⁷ A newspaper article quoted one of the leaders of the Independent Campesino Center, who stated that the organization would unite more than a million peasants who were not members of the CNC.²⁸ Over the course of three days, the founders of the new organization hammered out their goals and composed a "Call to the Nation," exhorting the campesinos to seize control over their own destinies. Their demands included peasant ownership of the land, improved access to water and credit, unionization of agricultural workers, and improved education and social security. "Through the independent and combative unification of the campesinos and the alliance of the working class," they declared, "we will continue forward, in spite of the obstacles

²⁶ On the CNC, see Larissa Adler de Lomnitz, Rodrigo Salazar Elena, and Ilya Adler, *Symbolism and Ritual in a One-Party Regime: Unveiling Mexico's Political Culture* (University of Arizona Press, 2010); Miguel González Compeán, Leonardo Lomelí, and Pedro Salmerón Sanginés, eds., *El partido de la revolución: Institución y conflicto, 1928-1999* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000).

²⁷ DFS agents estimated that one thousand people attended, while *Política* maintained that more than two thousand participated. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Lázaro Cárdenas and the CCI]," January 6, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-136-63, Leg. 1, Hoja 1, AGN; "Nace una Central," *Política*, January 15, 1963.

²⁸ "Constitución de la Central Campesina Independiente," *Ovaciones*, January 7, 1963.

and the attacks and WE WILL TRIUMPH for the good of the campesinos and of Mexico” [emphasis in original].²⁹

Cárdenas’s support of the Independent Campesino Center attracted special attention from the media and the government. When he arrived to speak at the group’s constitutional congress, the entire audience rose to its feet, applauding deliriously. A chant of “Cár-de-nas! Cár-de-nas! Cár-de-nas!” filled the air. The former president spoke to the assembly, declaring his support for the Independent Campesino Center and describing the organizers’ motivations as noble and patriotic.³⁰ The CCI plastered a quote from Cárdenas on all of its publications, posters, and propaganda: “Campesino: If the organization to which you belong does not defend your interests, abandon it.”³¹

The formation of the Independent Campesino Center prompted a tidal wave of criticism. Editorials in *Excélsior* called the organization a “ pro-Soviet communist trap” and described its leaders as “extremist Castro-communist militants.”³² The editorialist claimed that many of the speeches at the convention represented subversive, frank challenges to the national government. The *Excélsior* writer also called the CCI “political blackmail” and claimed: “its leaders are trying to submit us to a ‘peasant’ dictatorship.”³³

²⁹ “Nace una Central.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For example, see “[CCI letterhead],” n.d., DFS, Exp 11-136-64, Leg. 4, Hoja 350, AGN.

³² “Trampa comunista para campesinos: Futurismo político prosoviético,” *Excélsior*, January 8, 1963, sec. Editorial; “La nueva Central Campesina, guiada por Cárdenas, se perfila como partido político,” *Excélsior*, January 7, 1963.

³³ “El gran chantaje político; Quién da el dinero a los ‘campesinos’?,” *Excélsior*, January 9, 1963, sec. Editorial.

Many of the critics of the Independent Campesino Center directed their venom at Lázaro Cárdenas, the symbolic head of the organization. A congressman from Puebla called the ex-president “ungrateful, Machiavellian, and unpatriotic.”³⁴ An editorial in *Excélsior* contended that as the chief organizer of the National Campesino Confederation, Cárdenas was betraying his legacy by supporting the new peasant group.³⁵ Ex-president Emilio Portes Gil, who had published a series of letters to Cárdenas criticizing him for his participation in the National Liberation Movement, returned to his soapbox. Portes Gil said that Cárdenas was destroying his own prestige, claimed that he was attacking President López Mateos, and called him “an instrument of international communism.”³⁶

The chorus of critics even included people with ties to Cárdenas and the Mexican Revolution. General Heriberto Jara, one of Cárdenas’s closest friends, spoke out against the new campesino group. *Excélsior*, *Ovaciones*, and *El Nacional* published a declaration by the Agrarian Old Guard (the Vieja Guardia Agrarista, a group of many of the founders of the National Campesino Confederation) that accused the CCI of being anti-agrarian and unpatriotic.³⁷ “Cárdenas is dedicated to drawing away power and fomenting divisions,” claimed Rafael Carranza, a senator from Coahuila and the son of revolutionary hero Venustiano Carranza.³⁸ Emiliano Zapata’s son, head of the Zapatista

³⁴ “Nace una Central.”

³⁵ Luis Chavez Orozco, “Cárdenas, negación de sí mismo?,” *Excélsior*, January 11, 1963, sec. Editorial.

³⁶ Emilio Portes Gil, “Portes Gil lanza otra andanada de graves cargos a Cárdenas,” *Ovaciones*, January 24, 1963, sec. Editorial.

³⁷ Vieja Guardia Agrarista de México, “A la clase campesina,” *Excélsior*, January 9, 1963; “Declaración de la Vieja Guardia Agrarista de México,” *El Nacional*, January 9, 1963, sec. 1; Homero Bazan Viquez, “La Vieja Guardia contra los que apoyan la nueva central: Que se trata de dividir al pueblo en una maniobra de ocultos fines,” *Ovaciones*, January 9, 1963.

³⁸ “Nace una Central.”

Front of the Republic, exhorted the campesinos to ignore the Independent Campesino Center.³⁹ Juan Gil Preciado, governor of Jalisco and a former communist, declared that all those who were not with the National Campesino Confederation were “traitors to the Mexican Revolution.”⁴⁰

The leading leftist political party in the country also opposed the new campesino organization. By the time that the Independent Campesino Center came onto the scene, Vicente Lombardo Toledano had withdrawn his Popular Socialist Party from the National Liberation Movement and returned to the government fold. He did not respond favorably to the attempt to create a new organization that would challenge the government’s control over the peasantry. Lombardo Toledano sent a statement to the national press, calling the CCI “a new act of division inspired in the old and sick sectarianism of the Communist Party.”⁴¹

Government leaders took a dismissive approach to the Independent Campesino Center—at least, in public. Díaz Ordaz told reporters that the members of the new campesino group were simply making use of their constitutional right to free assembly.⁴² The editors of government-mouthpiece *El Nacional* advised their readers not to worry about the CCI, since it would soon become obvious that the group was unnecessary and ineffective.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid. On Nicolás Zapata’s betrayal of his father’s revolutionary legacy, see John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).

⁴⁰ “Nace una Central.”

⁴¹ “Rojo Gómez y Lombardo contra los cismáticos: El PPS dice que la CCI es obra del enfermizo sectarismo del PC,” *Excelsior*, January 9, 1963.

⁴² “Los integrantes de la CCI hacen uso de un derecho,” *Ovaciones*, January 8, 1963.

⁴³ “La política de la realidad agraria,” *El Nacional*, January 14, 1963, sec. 1.

President López Mateos publicly belittled the Independent Campesino Center. During a trip to France, the president faced questions from French journalists about the new campesino group. “The CCI is not at all important,” he responded. “The small grouping could be considered the ‘Battalion of Loose Pieces.’”⁴⁴ The trivializing nickname was a reference to the Center’s claims that they were not trying to steal members away from the National Campesino Confederation but merely providing an organization for those peasants that did not yet belong to any other group. The leaders of the CCI did not appreciate López Mateos’s slight and, at a celebration of the 25th anniversary of Cárdenas’s nationalization of the petroleum industry, proudly declared that their so-called “Loose-Piece Battalion” counted over 1.3 million members.⁴⁵

The Independent Campesino Center used its large membership to influence the government’s policy on political and economic issues. The organization organized public demonstrations as a pressure tactic. One of the largest took place in Puebla in 1964 on behalf of a union of milk producers against a new law of obligatory pasteurization. Three thousand people gathered to protest the law. Local police responded violently and arrested more than one hundred people. The next day, students gathered to denounce the repression and again the authorities interfered. Street demonstrations and confrontations between police and protestors continued for the next two weeks, until the state governor resigned. The interim governor revoked the controversial pasteurization law.⁴⁶ The Independent Campesino Center had won a significant victory and had demonstrated their group’s ability to mobilize opposition to the government.

⁴⁴ *Presencia internacional de Adolfo López Mateos*, vol. 1 (Mexico City, 1963), 431.

⁴⁵ “El ‘Batallón de sueltos’,” *Política*, April 15, 1963.

⁴⁶ “Puebla: Victoria del pueblo,” *Política*, November 1, 1964.

Security forces' intensive surveillance of the Independent Campesino Center reveals the fear that the group inspired. A report on a CCI meeting in Coahuila from the Ministry of National Defense related numerous quotes from members of the Center. One of the speakers told the one hundred and fifty people assembled that "the Independent Campesino Center is an organization of combat." A female speaker exhorted the members to "stop behaving so meekly and start behaving like men." If weapons were being used to enslave them, she continued, they could also be used to liberate them. Another speaker foretold the overthrow of the government and the installation of a Socialist Republic, a mission, he claimed, which the CCI was born to fulfill. One of the national leaders of the Independent Campesino Center, Ramón Danzós Palomino, swore to lead the peasants in arms against the "government of the bourgeoisie."⁴⁷

Speakers at the meeting suggested that the Mexican government no longer embodied the spirit of the Mexican Revolution. One campesino leader called López Mateos's program of agrarian reform "pure falsehood and lies" and maintained that it "would never equal the agrarian work of Lázaro Cárdenas." Another speaker contrasted the Mexican government's expenditures of public monies to widen avenues in Mexico City with the Cuban government's support of agriculture.⁴⁸ The Cuban Revolution had overtaken and replaced the Mexican one in the eyes of the CCI's members.

At the end of the report about the campesino meeting, the author, a general in the Mexican military, laid out his conclusions and recommendations regarding the Independent Campesino Center:

⁴⁷ General Francisco Ramírez Palacios, "[CCI meeting]," November 9, 1963, IPS Caja 2851 A, AGN.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The communist leaders [of the CCI] are practicing frank, subversive agitation against the Government, the Army, and other Institutions, and are the real cause of the land invasions in different States of the Republic; for which, in the opinion of this Superiority, they should be consigned to the Judicial Authorities and punished according to the Law, which would serve as an example to correct this dangerous agitation among campesinos and workers whom this Center is trying to unify.⁴⁹

Other members of the government's security services corroborated his claim that the Independent Campesino Center was dangerous. Agents of the Department of Federal Security attributed land invasions to CCI leadership and reported on the organization's efforts to provide legal defense for imprisoned campesinos.⁵⁰ They also read the group's mail and told their superiors about meetings between Lázaro Cárdenas and leaders of the peasant organization.⁵¹

The intelligence that López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz received about the Independent Campesino Center corroborated what they read about the group in the press. In their eyes, the CCI was a communist-dominated organization determined to undermine the government's control over the nation's peasantry. It posed a significant threat to political and economic stability.

LABOR ACTIVISM

Like the peasantry, the working class was an important pillar of the Mexican government that came under leftist pressure in the decade after the Cuban Revolution.

⁴⁹ Ramírez Palacios, "[CCI meeting]."

⁵⁰ "[list of invasiones de tierras]," February 29, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-136-64, Leg. 4, Hoja 290, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[CCI efforts on behalf of arrested campesinos]," October 31, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-136-63, Leg. 4, Hoja 73, AGN.

⁵¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[CCI letter to Cárdenas]," October 30, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-136-63, Leg. 4, Hoja 70, AGN; "[CCI activities]," May 7, 1963, IPS Caja 2935 A, AGN.

Lázaro Cárdenas, along with Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Fidel Velázquez, had answered the problem of labor activism in the 1930s by incorporating most workers into the government machine under the umbrella of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos, or CTM). The CTM was a single, national union that looked to the government as the arbiter of labor disputes and the regulator of industry. The government also managed to install “*charro*” leaders in most unions, whose loyalties lay with those in power rather than with the workers.⁵² These solutions to the labor problem were not seamless, however, and in the late 1950s the cracks in the system widened and threatened to topple the governing edifice.

The danger that the renegade workers posed to the government in the decade after the Cuban Revolution was not entirely like that of the campesinos. In the case of the peasantry, a new organization—the Independent Campesino Center—threatened to unite the unorganized campesinos against the government. In the case of the workers, the danger came from a number of different directions as various unions splintered away from the Confederation of Mexican Workers and tried to throw off government control. Beginning in late 1956 with a strike among electrical workers, a series of worker mobilizations challenged the state’s power over the labor sector. As minister of labor under President Ruiz Cortines, López Mateos headed the government’s efforts to reduce worker activism in the mid-to-late 1950s. López Mateos would face even greater challenges from the labor sector during his subsequent presidency.

The railroad workers, traditionally the most powerful and militant group, were the first to challenge their subordination to the Confederation of Mexican Workers when

⁵² A “charro” is a traditional Mexican cowboy. The original “charro,” Jesús Díaz de León, a leader of the railway workers association, would come to union assemblies dressed like a cowboy. He seized control of the railway union with government assistance in 1948, and since his time pro-PRI labor leaders have been known as “charros.” Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 575.

López Mateos became president in 1958. Frustrated with their low salaries, meager benefits, and *charro* leaders, they began organizing in May 1958 around Demetrio Vallejo, a labor leader and railroad worker from Oaxaca. Fidel Castro sent a telegram to Vallejo in 1959, congratulating him on his early victories.⁵³ The railroad unionist pulled the Association of Railroad Workers out of the Confederation of Mexican Workers and ordered a nationwide strike on Easter Sunday, 1959. This threatened to immobilize the entire country during Holy Week, or Semana Santa, the most important week of travel and tourism in Mexico. López Mateos responded by arresting ten thousand railway workers, including Vallejo.⁵⁴ The dissident labor leader would remain in prison for the next eleven years.

Despite the government's repression of the railway workers, other labor organizations staged their own strikes without permission from the CTM. Othón Salazar and Encarnación Pérez, leaders of the Revolutionary Teachers' Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio) continued to organize numerous strikes and demonstrations among the educational sector. Taxi drivers, bus drivers, telegraphers, airline pilots, metal workers, and telephone operators followed suit. Díaz Ordaz faced a strike movement among medical residents and interns immediately after he became president in 1964. The doctors held a series of escalating strikes from November 1964 until June 1965.⁵⁵

⁵³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Homenaje a la delegación cubana con sindicatos mexicanos," 16 1959, DFS, Exp 12-9-1959, Leg 3, Hoja 150, AGN.

⁵⁴ Alfonso Serrano, "Vallejo y centenares de líderes y revoltosos, aprehendidos," *Excélsior*, March 29, 1959.

⁵⁵ On the railroad workers' and doctors' strikes, see Evelyn Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974).

Though many of the strikers in reality had limited goals—higher wages, better benefits, and above all, the right to independent unions—government leaders and their agents saw more insidious explanations for labor activism in the 1960s. The head of the Department of Federal Security connected a 1962 general strike in Baja California to the National Liberation Movement in at least six separate reports on the issue. He claimed that MLN leaders travelled to Mexicali and spoke to more than six hundred agricultural workers of the United Industries of California about their problem with the salinity of the water coming from the United States. The movement leaders reportedly encouraged the striking workers to join their organization and told them that the National Liberation Movement supported their efforts.⁵⁶

Intelligence agents suspected that the communists, the Cubans, and the members of the National Liberation Movement were encouraging the workers to destabilize the government. The head of the Department of Federal Security informed the minister of the interior that railroad unionist Demetrio Vallejo had connections with a prominent Cuban communist and labor agitator.⁵⁷ Another document, a list of communist agitators, claimed that a member of the communist party and MLN who had made numerous trips to Cuba “intervened in workers’ strikes and seeks to take away unions from the Confederation of Mexican Workers.”⁵⁸

Government agents claimed that the National Liberation Movement was giving support to and recruiting members among petroleum workers and the striking doctors, as

⁵⁶ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN links with strikers in Mexicali],” September 21, 1962, DFS, Exp 100-2-1-62, Leg. 7, Hoja 111, AGN.

⁵⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[arrival of Cuban propagandist and labor activist],” August 28, 1959, DFS, Exp 12-9-59, Leg 4, Hoja 130, AGN.

⁵⁸ “Antecedentes y actividades de elementos agitadores comunistas,” 1964, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN.

well. One report maintained that the Mexican Communist Party and the National Liberation Movement were secretly directing and financing the doctors' strike.⁵⁹ A congressman sent Díaz Ordaz a report from the chief of Special Services of Pemex about subversion within Mexico's state-owned petroleum company. The report warned that a local MLN leader was an engineer in Pemex's Department of Security and Hygiene. The petroleum intelligence chief suspected the engineer of distributing communist propaganda and organizing opposition to the government amongst the workers.⁶⁰

Government leaders may have been uncertain about the underlying causes of labor activism, but they knew for a fact that many Mexican workers sympathized with the Cuban Revolution. A Cuban delegation travelled to Mexico in February 1959, and two thousand railroad workers, electricians, teachers, and other independent union members held a celebration in the visitors' honor.⁶¹ When Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós came to Mexico, telegraphers, sanitary workers, china factory employees, and electricians published welcoming advertisements in the national newspapers. "The cause of Cuba is the cause of Latin America," they declared, "because the crucial problems of our twenty sister countries are the same, and Cuba shows us, with her example, the path to the true and effective solution to the most grave of those problems."⁶²

Cuban holidays and international events prompted energetic demonstrations from the workers' groups. In 1961, six hundred students, railroad laborers and teachers—

⁵⁹ "[MLN organization of the doctors' strike]," February 2, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-6-65, Leg. 14, Hoja 43, AGN.

⁶⁰ Dip. Antonio García Rojas, "[MLN activities in Reynosa, Tamps]," August 1, 1962, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 27, AGN.

⁶¹ Rangel Escamilla, "Homenaje a la delegación cubana con sindicatos mexicanos."

⁶² "Bienvenido a México!," *Excélsior*, June 9, 1960.

followers of Demetrio Vallejo and Othón Salazar—gathered to celebrate the 26 of July in the state of Durango. During the event they praised Fidel Castro and Lázaro Cárdenas and carried signs that read “México Sí, Yanquis No.”⁶³ In January 1962, as the Organization of American States was meeting to expel Cuba, Othón Salazar sent a telegram of solidarity to Fidel Castro, which agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations copied and filed away. “Mexican patriots will maintain the battle to impede aggression against the Cuban nation,” Salazar promised.⁶⁴

Díaz Ordaz grew extremely frustrated with agrarian and labor activism during his six years as minister of the interior and the first few months of his presidency. In his first presidential address to the nation, he accused the “enemies of the Revolution” of trying to find fissures that would allow them to divide the country and harm its institutions:

Those who, instead of respecting and making noble use of the institutions which are fundamental to us such as agrarian distribution and the strike, try to denaturalize those institutions with their conduct and abuse them, try to discredit and violate them, they are not being more revolutionary, as they would like us to believe, but rather purely and simply counterrevolutionary, if not deliberately anti-Mexican.⁶⁵

The president’s words conveyed his anger at labor and campesino activists, as well as the importance that he attached to their activities. He was determined to use whatever means necessary to minimize union unrest and thereby protect the nation’s institutions.

⁶³ Francisco Ramírez Palacios, “[26 of July celebration in Durango],” July 28, 1961, IPS Caja 2964 C, AGN.

⁶⁴ Othón Salazar to Fidel Castro, January 22, 1962, IPS Caja 1456 A, AGN.

⁶⁵ Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, *Primer informe de Díaz Ordaz* (Mexico: Secretaría de Gobernación, 1965), 80.

LOSING CONTROL OVER INFORMATION

Mexican intellectuals joined the campesinos and workers in threatening to throw off government control in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. In the decades prior to 1959, the nation's leaders controlled the mass media and kept a tight rein on the public's access to knowledge. The official agency Producers and Importers of Paper (Productores e Importadores de Papel, S.A, or PIPSA) monopolized newsprint and manipulated the price and availability of paper. The government subsidized friendly newspapers through loans, credits, and purchases of advertising space. It intervened in labor disputes between newspaper owners and their employees. Luis Echeverría, Díaz Ordaz's minister of the interior and successor, plied newspaper editors with lavish gifts of whisky, champagne, cognac, luggage, and crystal candlesticks.⁶⁶ The government bribed journalists in monthly payments known as *embutes*; some writers allegedly earned as much as ten thousand pesos a month through this illicit channel.⁶⁷ A confidential document sent to Echeverría in 1965 stated: "The government of Mexico spends a significant amount of money each year for direct and indirect publicity, utilizing the radio, movies, television, newspapers and magazines. Informed people... estimate that the total is more than 1.5 billion pesos."⁶⁸

When bribes and cooptation failed, the government applied physical and economic pressure. They denied newspaper owners access to paper, raided their offices, and even imprisoned journalists. An anonymous treatise in Mexico's intelligence files

⁶⁶ Luis Echeverría, "[gifts from Echeverría to newspaper editors]," December 22, 1967, IPS Caja 2862 B Exp 2, AGN.

⁶⁷ "Corrupción, más que libertad," *Política*, June 15, 1961. *Embute* come from the verb *embutir*, which loosely translates as "to stuff." See also Carlos Monsiváis and Julio Scherer, *Tiempo de saber*.

⁶⁸ "[Press Summary]," January 4, 1965, IPS Caja 2939 B, AGN.

explained that the nation's leaders could use the media to control public opinion and thereby create an "Invisible Tyranny that adopts the form of a democratic government."⁶⁹ In order to build this invisible tyranny, the government needed to maintain control over the press.⁷⁰

As a result of this "pan y palo" (bread and bludgeon) relationship, the major national press outlets usually told their readers only what the government wanted them to hear. The newspaper *El Nacional* served as the mouthpiece of the nation's leaders.⁷¹ *El Universal* and *Novedades* toed the party line; the former was in bankruptcy and dependent on government subsidies, and the latter fired its leftist-leaning cultural editor in 1961. *La Prensa*, a popular purveyor of yellow journalism, was "the government's favorite mode of diffusion for its messages, ideas, fears, threats, and wrath."⁷² The secret press summary sent to Echeverría alluded to "a certain subordination" of *La Prensa* to the government.⁷³ The subordination increased with time and in 1967 the newspaper began publishing articles secretly written by employees of the Ministry of the Interior.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ "[La tiranía invisible]," 1965, IPS Caja 2998 A, AGN. My thanks to Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía for bringing this document to my attention.

⁷⁰ On the government's control over the media, see Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta: Los archivos prohibidos de la prensa y el poder* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2007); Monsiváis and Scherer, *Tiempo de saber*; Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico*; Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa Vendida. Los presidentes y los periodistas: 40 años de relaciones* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1993).

⁷¹ Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta*, 122; José T. Rocha, memorandum, May 10, 1961, IPS Caja 2874 A, AGN.

⁷² Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta*, 150.

⁷³ "[Press Summary]."

⁷⁴ Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta*, 161.

Even the most prestigious newspapers and magazines stayed within certain boundaries. *Excélsior* cooperated with the government until the mid 1960s, when a group of journalists led by Julio Scherer took over the production of the newspaper. The confidential report written for Echeverría in 1965 claimed that *Excélsior* was the newspaper that did the most damage to the government, even though it received the lion's share of the subsidies. The magazine *Siempre!* was relatively independent of government control and published a wide range of views. Though they positioned themselves as unbiased sources of information, both *Excélsior* and *Siempre!* nevertheless refrained from criticizing Mexican presidents or their policies.

Mexican leaders did not want to lose their control over information. When journalist Manuel Marcué Pardiñas began publishing the semimonthly magazine *Política* in May 1960, the government took immediate notice. Marcué Pardiñas had throughout his life collaborated with various leftist political organizations, including the Mexican Communist Party, the Popular Socialist Party, and the National Liberation Movement. He organized demonstrations in support of the striking railroad workers, the independent teachers' union, and the Cuban Revolution. He also took frequent trips to Cuba. Marcué Pardiñas maintained contact with important leftist leaders including railroad unionist Demetrio Vallejo, MLN leader Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, painter David Álfaro Siqueiros, Lázaro Cárdenas, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara. A 1965 edition of *Política* featured a cover photograph of Guevara reading Marcué Pardiñas's magazine (see Image 2.2).

From its first issue, *Política* established itself as the vanguard voice of the New Left in Mexico and championed the cause of Cuba. The magazine printed twenty five thousand copies twice a month, selling fifteen thousand in Mexico City, five thousand

across the rest of the country, and the remainder abroad.⁷⁵ The May 1, 1960, edition carried a story about a declaration of solidarity with Cuba signed by leaders from across Latin America, including Lázaro Cárdenas. Nearly every subsequent issue included at least one article about the island. Marcué Pardiñas and the other contributors provided in-depth analysis of Mexico's policy toward Cuba, advertised pro-Cuba events, printed texts of statements about the island from important political figures, and described pro-Cuba meetings and congresses in Mexico and across the Americas.

Política lauded the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution and cheered Castro in his struggle with the United States. Headlines in the magazine declared: "Cuba is the Current Example of America," "Cuba is Not Alone," "The Duty of the Moment: Defend Cuba," "The Defense of Cuba is Urgent," and "Let Us Detain the New Aggression Against Cuba!"⁷⁶ Political cartoons depicted Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as true revolutionary leaders, sent from the heavens to blow the dust and cobwebs off the decrepit Mexican Revolution (see Image 2.1). In pursuit of the goal of imitating the Cuban Revolution, *Política* published documents of Cuban origin that government leaders probably would have preferred to keep out of the public eye, including the full text of Che Guevara's guide to guerrilla warfare.⁷⁷ The magazine's covers and content encouraged its readers to follow Cuba's example (see Image 2.3), and Guevara's guerrilla guide provided instructions on how to replicate the Cuban Revolution.

⁷⁵ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "Revista 'Política,'" March 11, 1966, IPS Caja 2959A, AGN.

⁷⁶ "Cuba es el ejemplo actual de América," *Política*, May 15, 1960; "Cuba no está sola: Manifiesto del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," *Política*, January 15, 1962; "El deber del momento: Defender a Cuba," *Política*, September 15, 1962; Lázaro Cárdenas, "La defensa de Cuba es apremiante," *Política*, April 1, 1963; Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, "Detengamos la nueva agresión a Cuba!," *Política*, September 15, 1962.

⁷⁷ Ernesto "Che" Guevara, "La guerra de guerrillas: Un método. Una interpretación de la Segunda Declaración de La Habana," *Política*, October 1, 1963.



Image 2.2. *Política* magazine proudly displays one of its celebrity readers: Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Source: *Política*, October 15, 1965.

Even more than its defense of the Cuban Revolution, the magazine's coverage of domestic politics worried and offended government leaders. *Política* published articles by important leftist intellectuals including Carlos Fuentes, Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, David Álfaro Siqueiros, Eli de Gortari, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and Víctor Rico Galán, as well as political cartoons by Eduardo del Río or "Rius." It provided information about leftist groups including the National Liberation Movement and the Independent Campesino Center, describing the groups' meetings and other activities. It published advertisements for MLN gatherings and controversial declarations on various topics by the CCI, the Mexican Communist Party, the Popular Socialist Party, Lázaro Cárdenas, and others. When the major national press outlets and newspapers ignored or criticized the peace conference held in Mexico City in 1961, *Política* promoted the gathering, compiled a lengthy description of the proceedings and important speeches, and published the conference's documents and declarations.

In addition to providing favorable coverage of leftist activities and an outlet for intellectuals, *Política* supplied its readers with information that government leaders wanted to keep under wraps. The magazine frequently denounced and provided photographic evidence of state violence against campesinos, workers, and student groups. One article presented a long list of the government's violations of the constitution and repression of leftist activities.⁷⁸ The magazine provided detailed information about the government's crimes, including the murders of agrarian leader Rubén Jaramillo and other activists.⁷⁹ It called the public's attention to the arrests of leftist leaders such as CCI

⁷⁸ "El gobierno y el 'respeto' a la ley," *Política*, September 1, 1963.

⁷⁹ "La nación: La matanza de Xochicalco," *Política*, June 1, 1962. On Jaramillo, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.



Image 2.3: a cover of *Política* magazine featuring a photograph of Cuban revolutionary heroes Fidel Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos that tells readers: “Latin Americans! The road is not the Mexican Revolution.” Source: *Política*, August 1966

coordinator and presidential candidate Ramón Danzós Palomino.⁸⁰ Headlines blared: “Campesinos in Jail,” “More Political Assassinations,” “More Political Prisoners,” “Another Political Crime,” “Puebla: Blood and Jail,” and “Blood in Guerrero.”⁸¹

Manuel Marcué Pardiñas and the other contributors to *Política* not only aired the government’s dirty laundry, but also criticized the government itself. Editorials called the regime an oligarchy with an anti-democratic electoral system.⁸² An article about repression of students in Sonora compared the government’s tactics to those practiced during the pre-revolutionary era of “Porfirian Peace.”⁸³ A subsequent article about the same events in Sonora described the violence as “institutionalized terrorism”—most likely a thinly veiled play on the PRI’s claims about an institutionalized revolution.⁸⁴ An article about the murders of seven campesinos in Guerrero by police and members of the military called the operation “worthy of the best times of the Porfirian dictatorship.”⁸⁵

One of Marcué Pardiñas’s favorite targets was Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. He labeled the minister of the interior a reactionary and declared that he “should not and can not become president.”⁸⁶ In *Política*’s coverage of Díaz Ordaz’s presidential campaign, the

⁸⁰ “Manifestantes mancaneados,” *Política*, August 15, 1963.

⁸¹ “Campesinos en la cárcel,” *Política*, July 1, 1963; “Más asesinatos políticos,” *Política*, August 1, 1962; “Más presos políticos,” *Política*, August 15, 1966; “Otro crimen político,” *Política*, March 15, 1964; “Puebla: Sangre y cárcel,” *Política*, October 15, 1964; “Sangre en Guerrero,” *Política*, August 15, 1967.

⁸² José Felipe Pardiñas, “‘Política’ y la sucesión presidencial,” *Política*, May 15, 1963.

⁸³ The term “Porfirian” refers to Porfirio Díaz, the man who controlled Mexico for over thirty years until the Mexican Revolution of 1910 put an end to his semi-dictatorial reign. “Paz porfiriana” or “Porfirian peace” refers the stability and relative peace experienced in Mexico during Díaz’s time as president. “Sonora: Paz porfiriana,” *Política*, May 15, 1967.

⁸⁴ “Sonora: Terrorismo institucionalizado,” *Política*, July 1, 1967.

⁸⁵ “Terror en el campo,” *Política*, September 15, 1963.

⁸⁶ Pardiñas, “‘Política’ y la sucesión presidencial.”

magazine's journalists maintained that the crowds that the government gathered to greet the official candidate responded coldly and indifferently. The radio producers who broadcasted Díaz Ordaz's campaign speeches had to splice in applause from other recordings to compensate for the crowds' lukewarm response, *Política* claimed.⁸⁷ A 1963 cover of the magazine contained a cartoon of the presidential candidate wearing Catholic vestments with a Nazi swastika, carrying a bludgeon in one hand, and stone tablets in the other. The tablets contained a quote from *The Wall Street Journal* that described Díaz Ordaz as "a vehement anti-communist who commands the powerful support of ex-president Miguel Aleman and of the Catholic Church" (See Image 2.4). A pamphlet containing a copy of the cartoon and the accompanying article protesting Díaz Ordaz's candidacy made its way into the files of the government's Department of Political and Social Investigations.⁸⁸ The president-to-be was well aware of *Política's* criticism.

Manuel Marcué Pardiñas and *Política* received a great deal of attention from Díaz Ordaz and his intelligence agents. In 1966, the director of the Department of Federal Security compiled a twenty-one-page report about the journalist and his magazine. It described Marcué Pardiñas as "a radical communist... a violent and temperamental individual...with an irascible character." The journalist was "an immoral person, especially in his intimate life," who had affairs with the wives of his best friends and business partners.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ "La gira de GDO," *Política*, December 15, 1963.

⁸⁸ "[*Política* pamphlet]," November 1, 1963, IPS Caja 2851 A, AGN.

⁸⁹ Gutiérrez Barrios, "Revista '*Política*'." While Marcué Pardiñas did little to hide his amorous dalliances, including an affair with actress Beatriz Baz, he never admitted to seducing his friends' wives. Carlos Perzabal, *De las memorias de Manuel Marcué Pardiñas* (Mexico City: Editorial Rino, 1997), 22-25.

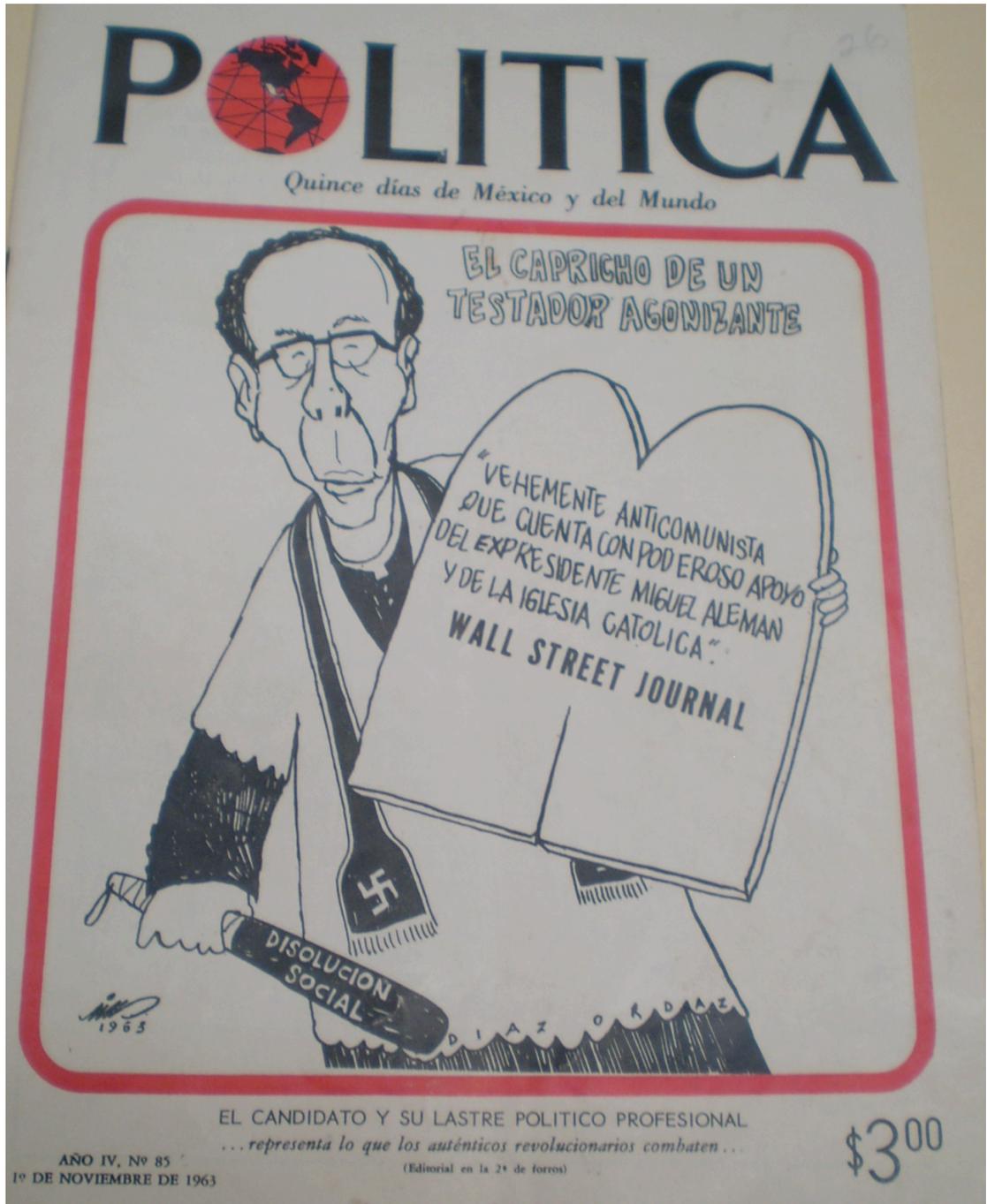


Image 2.4: An incendiary cartoon of presidential candidate Gustavo Díaz Ordaz on the cover of *Política*. Source: *Política*, November 1, 1963.

The report contained a great deal of information about Marcué Pardiñas's private and professional life, listing over twelve years' worth of his activities. It described how he organized and printed propaganda for demonstrations in favor of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, workers, students, political prisoners, and the Communist Party. He also helped arrange the welcome for Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós when he visited Mexico and promoted the creation of the José Martí Institute of Mexican-Cuban Cultural Exchange. The report claimed that Marcué Pardiñas made eleven trips to Cuba in the years following Fidel's triumph and received money from the Cuban and Soviet embassies to cover *Política's* expenses. Members of the *Política* staff also speculated that a significant amount of the magazine's funding came from Cuba and the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ Marcué Pardiñas confessed to having an account for the magazine in the National Bank of Cuba.⁹¹ "One of the characteristics of the magazine is the constant and systematic attack on the President of the Republic," the intelligence report claimed, backing up the assessment with lengthy excerpts from *Política* articles.⁹²

The Mexican government's treatment of *Política* was ambivalent. On the one hand, the head of intelligence collected information that could prove useful for blackmailing Marcué Pardiñas: his dirty deeds, his address, the license plate numbers of his cars, the financial information for *Política*, and the names, addresses, professions, and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 109, 130.

⁹¹ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68: La criminalización de la víctimas: México: Genocidio y delitos de lesa humanidad, documentos básicos 1968-2008* (Mexico City: Comité 68 Pro Libertades Democráticas, 2008), 358.

⁹² Gutiérrez Barrios, "Revista 'Política.'"

employers of all his family members.⁹³ The government-run paper monopoly frequently refused to extend credit or sell paper to the magazine.⁹⁴ Sometimes intelligence agents even confiscated issues of *Política* containing articles that were “offensive to the regime.”⁹⁵ On the other hand, the editor of a reputable journal with insider knowledge claimed that Marcué Pardiñas received ten thousand pesos a month to fund his magazine from someone in the government.⁹⁶ Díaz Ordaz had the power and resources to shut down Marcué Pardiñas at any time, but instead let him continue his magazine until 1967. Perhaps it was easier to co-opt *Política*’s editor than to forcibly silence him.

Política and its “irascible” editor were not, however, the only threats to the government’s control over information. The National Liberation Movement, the Mexican Communist Party, and other groups and individuals produced their own publications without sanction or support from the state. The MLN published a magazine called *Liberation*, which, one intelligence agent claimed, “[had] a magnificent reception in political circles, student groups, workers’ associations, and among the general public interested in the political development of the country.”⁹⁷ The Communist Party published *The Voice of Mexico*, a newspaper that sold between twenty-five and fifty thousand

⁹³ “Revista ‘Política’” October 24, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-109-1966, Leg. 1, Hoja 158, AGN.

⁹⁴ Manuel Marcue Pardiñas and Jorge Carrión, “La Maniobra Continúa,” *Política*, November 1, 1960; “La PIPSA Contra Política,” *Política*, March 15, 1966.

⁹⁵ Dirección General de Correos, memorandum, November 8, 1966, from the personal collection of Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía, obtained in the Archivo General de la Nación. On the removal of *Política* from the mail, see also “Denuncia al Presidente Díaz Ordaz y al Procurador General de la República,” *Política*, August 15, 1966.

⁹⁶ Francisco Torres Gastelum, “Comiendo carne del perro,” No. 3. From the personal collection of Jacinto Rodríguez Munguía.

⁹⁷ José Jiménez García, “[MLN magazine],” September 2, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-6-65, Leg. 15, Hoja 94, AGN.

copies weekly across the country.⁹⁸ Other leftist groups created and distributed various publications, including the Mexican Communist Workers Party's "extremely combative" magazine *The Spark* and the dissident leftist magazine *Why?*⁹⁹ This so-called "clandestine press" denounced government repression, provided information about organizational efforts, and promoted the defense of Cuba.¹⁰⁰

The prospect of losing control over information worried the leaders of the Mexican government. Intelligence agents expended a great deal of effort monitoring all manner of publications, clipping newspaper and magazine articles, and composing daily press summaries for the minister of the interior. The government's control over information was considerable, but it was not absolute. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz did not want to increase the popular appeal—and consequently, the power—of magazines such as *Política* by giving them an exclusive claim to the rallying cry of "Defend the Cuban Revolution!" Instead, government leaders co-opted one of the favorite causes of the dissident press, and used it to boost their regime's popularity.

LOSING CONTROL OVER ELECTIONS

A final institution that Mexico's leaders sought to keep under their power was the electoral system. Since the days of Porfirio Díaz, elections had been a consistent part of

⁹⁸ "Órgano informativo del Partido Comunista Mexicano y su distribución," April 19, 1966, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN. See also "[PCM newspaper]," May 2, 1966, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN.

⁹⁹ "Antecedentes de Partidos y Organizaciones Políticas," January 17, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-10-66, Leg. 1, Hoja 47, AGN.

¹⁰⁰ "El asalto policiaco no lo impedirá: El Partido Comunista continua la lucha contra el imperialismo, por la democracia y por la paz: Exijamos la libertad de todos los detenidos!," *La Voz de México*, April 18, 1965; "La solidaridad cierra el paso a la agresión Yanqui contra Cuba: Mítin en el Hemiciclo a Juárez, los pueblos apoyan a Cuba," *La Voz de México*, June 12, 1966; Comité Central del PCM, "Resoluciones del IV Pleno: Sobre la lucha de masas y la solidaridad con los pueblos," *La Voz de México*, April 18, 1965.

Mexican political life. However, for most of the twentieth century they expressed the will of the leaders rather than the masses. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional—the official party—dominated electoral politics in the 1960s. The president, in turn, guided the PRI. Candidates from the official party occupied nearly every post in the national Congress, as well as most state and municipal government offices. Electoral fraud ran rampant. Members of the government, the armed forces, and the PRI managed the registration of new parties, controlled polling sites, distributed ballots (many of them pre-marked for the benefit of illiterate voters), guarded the boxes, counted the votes, and calculated the results.

The major “opposition” parties—the conservative Party of National Action (Partido de Acción Nacional, or PAN) and the liberal Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista, or PPS)—posed little threat to the official party in the 1960s. The Ministry of the Interior even covered the expenses of one opposition party, the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution, in order to maintain the illusion of democracy.¹⁰¹ The leaders of the so-called “loyal opposition” would usually support the PRI’s presidential candidates in return for lower-level positions and other political and financial favors. The electoral system was a well-oiled machine, one that López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz were determined to keep running.¹⁰²

The creation of the National Liberation Movement prompted speculation that Mexico’s leftists were uniting to form a new political party. The head of the Department

¹⁰¹ Rodríguez Munguía, *La otra guerra secreta*, 225.

¹⁰² The literature on the Mexican electoral system is vast. Highlights include: Lorenzo Meyer, *La segunda muerte de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y arena, 1992); Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano: las posibilidades de cambio* (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1972); Héctor Aguilar Camín and Lorenzo Meyer, *A la sombra de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y arena, 1989); Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico: The Decline of Authoritarianism*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

of Federal Security reported that the leaders of the MLN held meetings with other leftists to discuss the possibility of creating a new electoral coalition.¹⁰³ Another agent simply referred to the movement as “Alonso Aguilar Monteverde’s newly formed party.”¹⁰⁴ A commander in the Ministry of Defense claimed that the goal of the National Liberation Movement was to “form a party in open opposition to the legally formed government.”¹⁰⁵

Lázaro Cárdenas’s involvement with the National Liberation Movement added fuel to the fire. Government agents already suspected the ex-president of harboring electoral designs. Intelligence officers relayed rumors that his son, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, was preparing to run for president with the support of the MLN.¹⁰⁶ A member of the movement in Acapulco reportedly told his companions that if Cuauhtémoc decided to run, they would have to unite and “battle physically to raise him to that high post.”¹⁰⁷

Government leaders’ fears of an electoral challenge became a reality in April 1963, with the formation of the People’s Electoral Front (Frente Electoral del Pueblo, or FEP). On April 22, the leaders of the Front held a press conference, confirming the rumors about a new, leftist party.¹⁰⁸ They distributed a manifesto that read: “The hour has

¹⁰³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN discussing possibility of forming new leftist party],” April 5, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-6-63, Leg. 10, Hoja 10, AGN.

¹⁰⁴ Capitán de la Barreda, “Movimiento de Liberación Nacional,” December 13, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 5, Hoja 291, AGN.

¹⁰⁵ Cuenca Díaz, “Actividades del MLN en Baja California.”

¹⁰⁶ “[Rumor that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas might run for president],” March 31, 1963, DFS, Exp 100-6-3-63, Leg. 1, Hoja 90, AGN; “[Rumor that Cuauhtémoc might run for president],” August 27, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 3, Hoja 62, AGN.

¹⁰⁷ “[Rumors that Cuauhtémoc might run for president],” September 8, 1963, DFS, Exp 100-10-3-63, Leg. 1, Hoja 78, AGN.

¹⁰⁸ Rogelio Cárdenas, “En los frentes políticos: Junta organizadora del FEP,” *Excelsior*, April 23, 1963.

arrived for the people to choose sides, to unite and organize, to steel themselves to defend, in the electoral battle that approaches, their interests and those of the nation.” The FEP leaders described the dangers of demobilizing the Mexican masses, as the PRI had done, and denounced the politicians who “call themselves revolutionaries but deep down agree with the policies of the government.”¹⁰⁹ The new party drew support from numerous leftist organizations, including Demetrio Vallejo’s National Railroad Workers Council, Othón Salazar’s Revolutionary Teachers’ Movement, the Independent Campesino Center, and the Mexican Communist Party. The FEP aimed to participate in the 1964 elections, and its leaders hoped that under the new electoral reform law they could at least obtain a few positions in the Congress and in local offices.¹¹⁰

The FEP’s platform echoed the demands of the National Liberation Movement and the 1961 Latin American Peace Conference, including the defense of Cuba. Its candidates called for political and social democratization, independent economic development, full sovereignty, national liberation, improvement in the quality of life, and respect for self-determination.¹¹¹ The leaders of the new party celebrated Cuba as an example of a country that had already achieved many of those goals. At the party’s national assembly, the FEP’s presidential candidate read a resolution of solidarity with Cuba, and called Castro’s Revolution “an example of the emancipatory battle in the Latin American sphere.” A member from Nayarit stated on the same occasion: “We consider

¹⁰⁹ “Nace el FEP,” *Política*, May 1, 1963.

¹¹⁰ The Electoral Law of 1962 reformed the constitutionally prescribed electoral allotments and guaranteed five congressional seats to any party polling 2.5 percent of the vote (up to a maximum of twenty seats), even if that party did not actually win in any constituencies.

¹¹¹ “Convocatoria del FEP,” *Política*, October 15, 1963.

the enemies of Cuba our own enemies... the Cuban Revolution is our revolution, which we must defend and support.”¹¹²

The similarities in the leadership and the goals of the People’s Electoral Front and the National Liberation Movement caused a considerable amount of confusion. Many of the leaders of the Front were also prominent members of the MLN, but the movement took pains to make clear that the group as a whole would refrain from endorsing any parties or candidates. The National Liberation Movement tried to preemptively distinguish itself from the new political party by publishing a declaration about the 1964 elections.¹¹³ The declaration affirmed that the MLN was not a political party and would not endorse any candidates. It was a coalition of a wide range of groups and individuals, and its leaders felt that supporting the electoral designs of any one of its parts would be a disservice to the whole. If any members of the movement wished to participate in electoral politics either by supporting an existing party or organizing a new one, they were free to do so as long as they did not use the MLN’s name to promote any specific positions. When *Política*’s coverage of the formation of the People’s Electoral Front claimed that the MLN had created the new party, the movement’s leaders corrected the error in a strongly worded letter to the editor.¹¹⁴

The National Liberation Movement took a different approach to the electoral process. In November 1963, its leaders began preparing propaganda for distribution across the country. Pamphlets, some of which landed in the hands of intelligence agents,

¹¹² Felix L. Alvahuante et al., “[FEP asamblea nacional day 2],” June 27, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 2, Hoja 148, AGN.

¹¹³ “El MLN y la campaña electoral,” *Política*, May 1, 1963.

¹¹⁴ Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, “Aclaración del MLN,” *Política*, May 15, 1963.

exhorted voters to get wise to the government's electoral deception and demonstrate their political consciousness by casting blank ballots.¹¹⁵

The FEP's relationship with Lázaro Cárdenas was also ambiguous and controversial. The former president had shown his willingness to support opposition groups when he spoke out in favor of the National Liberation Movement and the Independent Campesino Center. The question on everyone's mind in 1963 and 1964 was: whom would Cárdenas endorse for president? The counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico told his superiors in July 1963 that Cárdenas's influence on the elections and his relationship with the People's Electoral Front was "an enigma."¹¹⁶ The head of the Department of Federal Security reported in February 1964 that Cárdenas had been seen meeting with FEP leaders.¹¹⁷

Leaders of the People's Electoral Front added to the confusion by invoking Cárdenas's name and legacy in their campaign. The Front's presidential candidate told the crowd at a rally in Cuautla, Morelia, that after Cárdenas's departure from office, the government had suffered a marked regression.¹¹⁸ In the ex-president's birthplace of Jiquilpan, Michoacán, the FEP candidate called his administration "the only revolutionary and progressive regime."¹¹⁹ In Zamora, Michoacán, the head of the

¹¹⁵ José Jiménez García, "[MLN propaganda encouraging people to cast blank votes]," November 29, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-6-63, Leg. 11, Hoja 171, AGN.

¹¹⁶ Robert W. Adams, "Progress Report on the Presidential Race," July 30, 1963, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston [hereafter JFK Library].

¹¹⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Cárdenas meeting with FEP leaders]," February 26, 1964, DFS, Version Publica de Lazaro Cardenas del Rio, Leg. 3, Hoja 139, AGN.

¹¹⁸ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP campaign--Morelia]," April 10, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 8, Hoja 59, AGN.

¹¹⁹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP campaign--Michoacán]," February 27, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 7, Hoja 59, AGN.

People's Electoral Front led a crowd of three hundred campesinos in a round of cheers for the new party, the Independent Campesino Center, and Lázaro Cárdenas.¹²⁰ All these events generated extensive reports in the secret annals of the Mexican security agencies.

Cárdenas broke his sphinx-like silence shortly before the elections, and his decision struck a blow to his friends in the People's Electoral Front. "Gustavo Díaz Ordaz has the recognized honesty and character to govern, and will protect the weak against the strong," he declared.¹²¹ Thus ended the debate over Cárdenas's political loyalties.

Even without Cárdenas's endorsement, the leaders of the People's Electoral Front worked tirelessly to organize a grassroots challenge to the PRI's political machine. They held assemblies in states across the nation in order to get the seventy-five thousand signatures required to gain official recognition as a party. They organized a national registration assembly in Mexico City, attended by members of the National Liberation Movement, Independent Campesino Center, Mexican Communist Party, and workers' unions, as well as by numerous police and intelligence agents.¹²² Less than three months after the Front's leaders announced the creation of their new party, they presented the Ministry of the Interior with a petition for recognition. The document contained more than eighty-four thousand signatures.¹²³

¹²⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP campaign--Michoacán]," February 26, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 7, Hoja 55, AGN.

¹²¹ "Díaz Ordaz visitó la Cuenca del Balsas acompañado de Cárdenas: Al darle bienvenida a la región, el ex presidente expresó su confianza en que el candidato del PRI sabrá gobernar," *El Nacional*, June 10, 1964.

¹²² Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "FEP asamblea de registro," June 16, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 1, Hoja 133, AGN.

¹²³ "Partido Habemus," *Política*, July 15, 1963. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP petitions to become a political party]," July 5, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 2, Hoja 197, AGN.

The government's negative response to the petition did not come as a surprise. Díaz Ordaz denied the Front official recognition, claiming that the new party did not hold the required number of registration assemblies and that many of the signatures on the petition were falsifications or repetitions.¹²⁴ The leaders of the People's Electoral Front resolved to maintain the fight and participate in the elections, regardless of Díaz Ordaz's response. In November an intelligence agent told his superiors that the FEP's presidential candidate was about to begin his tour of the Yucatán, "where he is said to count on the support of seventy-five percent of the population."¹²⁵ The report suggested that the lack of official recognition had not dampened the public's enthusiasm for the People's Electoral Front.

Government leaders did not welcome any real challenges to the PRI's monopoly on elections and learned from their intelligence agents that the People's Electoral Front could represent just such a threat. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz knew that they could use the tools at their disposal to manipulate the electoral results, but they also set great store in maintaining the illusion of democracy. The more popular opposition parties such as the FEP became, the harder it would be to pretend that the PRI represented the genuine will of the masses. Government leaders' fears of the new party and doubts about their own popularity prompted them to co-opt one of their competitor's rallying banners: defense of the Cuban Revolution.

¹²⁴ "El FEP, sin registro," *Política*, November 1, 1963.

¹²⁵ "[FEP candidate begins campaign]," November 7, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 4, Hoja 81, AGN.

CONCLUSION

In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, Mexican intelligence agents painted a frightening picture of domestic leftist activism, and Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz listened. The creation of new, leftist organizations such as the National Liberation Movement and the Independent Campesino Center added to the perceived threats of labor, media, and electoral opposition. The intelligence agents told their supervisors that leftist groups were growing in numbers and power. They told them that the leftists were prepared to challenge the government in the fields, in the factories, in the pages of the national press, and in the ballot boxes. Intelligence agents also took close note of the leftists' dedication to the Cuban cause.

López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz feared that cutting relations with Cuba could potentially unite the disparate leftist groups and individuals in opposition to the government's foreign policy. Neither man wanted to preside over a repeat performance of the Cuban or Mexican Revolution. They also calculated that maintaining relations could win political capital for their regime and help shore up its revolutionary image. The choice was clear. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz maintained their country's relations with Cuba as part of their efforts to maintain control over the leftist sectors of the Mexican population.

However, the power dynamic was not unidirectional. While the Mexican government was using its foreign policy to maintain control over domestic groups, those domestic groups were using their organizational capacity to influence their country's international relations. By making foreign policy a tool of internal control, Mexican leaders left questions of international relations open to domestic influence. Leftist groups' near-unanimous enthusiasm for Cuba compelled Mexican government officials to maintain relations with Castro.

Chapter 3: Threats to the Nation

“A new revolution is indispensable.”
--Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, head secretary
of the Central Committee of the Mexican
Communist Party, at the group’s 15th national
congress, June 18, 1967

*“From what we can see, we are in
agreement with Che, we are in agreement with
Fidel Castro as to the necessity of accepting
guerrilla warfare as the principal form of battle.”*
--Lucio Cabañas, Mexican guerrilla leader,
1972¹

In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, Mexican leaders were taking no chances. They had watched a small group of guerrillas spearhead a social revolution in neighboring Cuba and were determined to avoid Batista’s fate. The governing elite and their security forces shared the U.S. government’s anti-communist bent.² They were on the lookout for communists, socialists, subversives, revolutionaries, and guerrillas—and they found them.

Intelligence agents in Mexico, like those in the United States, labeled most oppositional activity as “communist” or “subversive,” and a vicious cycle evolved in which the agents’ paranoia both fed upon and, in turn, increased the fears of their superiors. Some of the so-called “communists” who abounded in the pages of the Mexican intelligence reports were actually members of the Mexican Communist Party, the Popular Socialist Party, and the Mexican Workers and Peasants Party, but many were

¹ Baloy Mayo, *La guerrilla de Genaro y Lucio: Análisis y resultados*, 4th ed. (Mexico City: Grupo Jaguar Impresiones, 2001), 94.

² Martha Knisely Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

not. Some of the “guerrilla groups” in the intelligence reports were actually organizing armed rebellions, but others were the products of baseless rumors and fevered imaginations. Fact and myth blended together in the pages of the security reports and the national media, creating a climate of suspicion and uncertainty.

Both participants in and observers of the Mexican communist movement frequently confused, ignored, and blurred the distinctions between the terms “Marxist,” “Communist,” and “Socialist.” People jumped from one party to another and groups changed names; meanwhile, observers frequently lumped them all together into the catch-all category of “communists.” This chapter makes an effort both to represent faithfully the historical actors as they would have described themselves and to examine how Mexico’s leaders and their intelligence agents perceived the communists and other leftists.

This chapter delves into the darkest and most extreme fears of the Mexican intelligence agents and their superiors, Presidents Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. It draws predominantly upon the reports that agents of the Department of Federal Security, the Department of Political and Social Investigations, and the Federal Police composed about leftist activity in the 1960s. The focus in this chapter, as in the rest of the dissertation, is less on “fact” than on perception.

The following analysis explores who Mexican leaders believed were communists, what they believed the communists and other radicals were plotting, and why they believed that maintaining relations with Cuba would defuse leftist activism. Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz received information from their most trusted sources suggesting that communists were working to overthrow their government. Intelligence agents told their superiors that the leftists were receiving instruction from the Cubans and the Soviets, that they were infiltrating various institutions and organizations, that they

were subverting the national order, that they were taking to the hills to form guerrilla groups, and that they were preparing a new revolution. Events such as the Jaramillista movement and the guerrilla uprisings in Chihuahua and Guerrero lent credibility to the reports. It is impossible to know exactly how much of the intelligence information López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz believed, but their reactions to the few undeniable instances of extreme leftist activism indicate that they took the “communist” threat very seriously and sought to minimize it through a combination of concession and repression. Fear of leftist infiltration, subversion, and revolution drove these leaders’ decision to placate the extreme left by maintaining diplomatic relations with Cuba.

THE MEXICAN COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

Communism in Mexico, as historian Barry Carr argues, is best described as a movement. Carr explains that, as a result of group in-fighting and party expulsions, “there have been several Mexican Communisms.”³ The first Mexican organization to be affiliated with the Soviet Comintern, the Mexican Communist Party (Partido Comunista Mexicano, or PCM), emerged in November 1919 from an extraordinary session of what had previously been called the Mexican Socialist Party.⁴

The new party had a rocky first few years thanks to low membership, scarce funds, and bouts of governmental repression, but by the end of the 1920s it had established important ties with railroad workers, miners, and peasants’ groups. Railroad activist Valentín Campa, who along with Demetrio Vallejo would spearhead the railroad

³ Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

workers' movement in the late 1950s, joined the party in 1927.⁵ During the 1920s the Mexican Communist Party also established close connections with a group of young muralists including Diego Rivera, David Álfaro Siqueiros, Xavier Guerrero, and José Clemente Orozco. However, by the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, the Comintern's new sectarian policies and ultraleftism impelled the Mexican branch to drive out many of its members and cut its ties with non-communist allies. Government repression forced the PCM to move underground from 1930 to 1934, at which point the party nearly disappeared.

The Mexican Communist Party recovered from the lows of the early 1930s and reached the height of its power and popularity during Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency. Upon entering office in 1934, Cárdenas lifted the restrictions on the communist press and ordered the release of political prisoners who belonged to the party. The PCM, in turn, played an important role in the worker and peasant mobilizations of the 1930s, helped organize the Confederation of Mexican Workers, and supported the government's program of socialist education. According to Carr, the communists' greatest success in this period was acquiring an important presence within the administrative apparatus of the state, especially among educational administrators and teachers.⁶ By the end of Cárdenas's presidency, teachers formed the largest single group within the Mexican Communist Party. The organization also massively broadened its overall membership and gained influence among workers, campesinos, and intellectuals.

⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶ Ibid., 57. On the Cardenista socialist education initiative, see Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

The PCM's day in the sun did not last long, and by the late 1930s the party was once again in trouble. Turmoil within the communist organization culminated in an extraordinary congress in March 1940, during which the group ousted many of its top leaders. Further waves of expulsions took place throughout the following decade, as the communists struggled to respond to the repression of Miguel Alemán's administration (1946-1952) and the creation of Vicente Lombardo Toledano's new Popular Party in 1948.

Under Alemán, communists and other leftists were purged from their positions in the government and unions, and the police and army attacked them with greater frequency and audacity. Carr describes the 1950s as an almost complete disaster for the Mexican Communist Party, as the group stumbled from one crisis to another and eventually had to go practically underground as a result of the mass arrests following the 1958-1959 railroad workers' movement.⁷ The Thirteenth National Congress of the PCM took place in May 1960 under conditions of extreme secrecy: fewer than one hundred delegates sequestered themselves for five days in a rented building south of Mexico City that had once served as a brothel.⁸

In the 1960s, the Mexican Communist Party faced the advent of the New Left and of new leftist groups and organizations. Members and leaders of the Communist Party joined and helped organize new groups such as the National Liberation Movement, the Independent Campesino Center, and the People's Electoral Front. Communist participation in these organizations often served as a lightning rod for outside criticism

⁷ Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 190.

⁸ "Revolución en el PCM," *Política*, June 15, 1960. Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*.

and as a source of internal tension. Meanwhile, the Communist Party gained popularity among a new generation of students who had been radicalized by the Cuban Revolution. The PCM helped initiate the creation of a new national student federation, the National Center of Democratic Students (Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, or CNED). Throughout the 1960s, the Mexican Communist Party remained small, numbering no more than two thousand, but its members took part in much of the leftist activism of the decade.⁹

The Mexican Communist Party was not the only group to espouse Marxist principals and goals. In 1948, Vicente Lombardo Toledano founded the Popular Party, which flirted with Marxist theory and “officially” adopted Marxism-Leninism in 1960, when it changed its name to the Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista, or PPS).¹⁰ Lombardo Toledano established the group as the embodiment of his long-standing goal of creating a unified leftist front, and the new party initially attracted the support and participation of many former members of the Mexican Communist Party and unaffiliated leftists. It grew rapidly in its early years, with a core of intellectuals, peasants, and agricultural workers.

The Popular Socialist Party played an ambivalent role in Mexican politics: Lombardo Toledano and other leaders made occasional independent and even radical gestures, especially on the subject of Cuba, but generally toed the government line on matters of domestic policy. This ambivalence increased the divisions that already existed within the Popular Socialist Party, and many members resigned in disgust, especially

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Rosendo Bolívar Meza, *Lombardo: Su pensamiento político* (Mexico City: Universidad Obrera de México, 2006), 157-167.

over the issue of Lombardo Toledano's conciliatory attitude toward the national government. Historian Stephen R. Niblo has described the PPS as Lombardo Toledano's attempt to "find a formula by which he could oppose the PRI without offending the government."¹¹ The change to a more radicalized name came, ironically, at a time when the leadership of the socialist party became ever more closely allied with the government and more hostile to the communists.

In 1950, another communist party emerged in Mexico as a result of the Mexican Communist Party's infighting and expulsions. The Mexican Worker-Peasant Party (Partido Obrero-Campesino Mexicano, or POCM) incorporated many of the most effective leaders ousted from the communist party during the 1940s, including railroad unionists Valentín Campa and Demetrio Vallejo.¹² The communist splinter party was never very large; nonetheless, it occasionally managed to play an important role in worker and peasant activism. The rank and file members of the two communist parties frequently cooperated in spite of the animosity between the leaderships. The most notable achievement of the Mexican Worker-Peasant Party was the campaign waged by railroad workers in 1958-59 for better salaries, in which members of the PCM also lent a hand.

Like the other Mexican communists, Trotskyists had trouble maintaining unity in their ranks and stability in their organizations. Followers of Leon Trotsky, the man who had helped lead Russia's October Revolution only to lose power to Joseph Stalin, they engaged in constant competition and struggle with adherents of the predominant strain of Stalinist communism. Prominent members of Mexican leftist society occasionally

¹¹ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 229.

¹² Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 189.

associated with or defended the Fourth International, as the Trotskyist movement was known. Writer José Revueltas, muralist Diego Rivera, and labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano all became involved with the Trotskyists at one point or another.¹³

During the Cárdenas administration, the Trotskyists had enough pull in some government circles to convince the president to grant their leader asylum in Mexico in late 1936. The Mexican members of the Fourth International took upon themselves the responsibility of protecting Trotsky during his exile, sharing the responsibility with his followers from the United States and Germany. Despite their best efforts, a second assassination attempt succeeded in Mexico City in 1940. Even during Trotsky's time in Mexico, his followers in that country could not maintain a unified party. Turmoil within the ranks continued to be a problem, with a brief respite in the early 1940s. The movement enjoyed a revival in the late 1950s, chiefly among students, but still suffered from bickering among its members that continued throughout the 1960s.¹⁴

The history of the communist movement in Mexico was one of people, in addition to parties. Rank-and-file members of the organizations frequently ignored or disobeyed their leaders' directives. As mentioned earlier, members of the Mexican Communist Party cooperated with those of the Mexican Worker-Peasant Party, even when the leaders of the two groups were in conflict. The heads of a guerrilla group that attacked a military barracks in Ciudad Madera in 1965 had been members of the Popular Socialist Party, which officially espoused a policy of peaceful cooperation with the federal government.¹⁵

¹³ Robert J. Alexander, *Trotskyism in Latin America* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 179-184.

¹⁴ On Trotskyist student groups, see René Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM: Organizaciones, movilizaciones y liderazgos (1958-1972)* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Estudios Superiores Aragón, 2007).

¹⁵ Laura Castellanos, *México armado 1943-1981* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 2007).

Many individuals on the left wing of society bounced between parties or avoided affiliation with them entirely. Novelist José Revueltas was a member of the Mexican Communist Party from 1932 until he was expelled in 1943. He then helped Vicente Lombardo Toledano found the Popular Party in 1948, rejoined the PCM in 1956, and was expelled again in 1960. He later briefly joined the Mexican Worker-Peasant Party before forming the Leninist Spartacist League.¹⁶ Diego Rivera joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1922, resigned in 1925, was readmitted in 1926, and was then expelled in 1929. In 1936, the muralist joined the Fourth International. He helped persuade President Cárdenas to grant refuge to Leon Trotsky, who lived with Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo for a little over a year until Rivera discovered Kahlo's affair with their houseguest. In 1939, Rivera broke with the Troksyist party, and for the next decade he repeatedly applied to rejoin the Mexican Communist Party (with a brief interlude as a member of the Popular Party in 1948) until he was readmitted to the PCM in 1954.¹⁷ Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera's wife and a world-renowned artist in her own right, joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1928. She flirted (quite literally) with Trotskyism in the late 1930s and rejoined the PCM in 1949.¹⁸

Mexican Marxist organizations may not have been coherent or stable, but they were influential. Communists and socialists occasionally played important roles in Mexico's political and cultural life throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Sometimes they enjoyed a clear influence on politics, as in the cases of Cárdenas's

¹⁶ Roberto Simon Crespi, "José Revueltas (1914-1976): A Political Biography," *Latin American Perspectives* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 1979): 93-113.

¹⁷ Patrick Marnham, *Dreaming with His Eyes Open: A Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

¹⁸ Hayden Herrera, *Frida, a Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Perennial Library, 1983).

socialist educational program or the railroad strikes of the late 1950s. Other times Marxists' influence took more indirect or ambiguous forms. Intelligence agents, the police, the media, and the nation's leaders struggled to understand the goals and plans of communists and other leftists in the wake of the Cuban Revolution.

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY

One of the assumptions that U.S. leaders and their allies—including those in Mexico—made during the Cold War was that the Soviets were crafting an international communist conspiracy. Anti-communist rhetoric and ideology had colored American and Mexican politics for decades, but the Soviet Union's consolidation of power following the Second World War raised the stakes.¹⁹ As a result, Mexican leaders, like their neighbors to the north, were quick to interpret local activism as part of a larger, international conspiracy directed by the Soviets.

George F. Kennan explained the methods that the Soviets used to spread their ideology in his famous “Long Telegram” of 1946. He claimed that one element of Soviet policy entailed the use of “‘democratic-progressive’ elements abroad... to bring pressure to bear on capitalist governments along lines agreeable to Soviet interests.” Kennan elaborated that that the so-called “democratic-progressive agencies” that the Soviets would use included labor unions, social organizations, and liberal magazines. “The Soviet regime,” he concluded, “has an elaborate and far flung apparatus for exertion of its influence in other countries, an apparatus of amazing flexibility and versatility, managed by people whose experience and skill in underground methods are presumably without

¹⁹ On anti-communism in U.S. politics and society, see David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy so Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Free Press, 1983); Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

parallel in history.”²⁰ Though Mexican presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz did not read George Kennan’s telegram, they were steeped in the Cold War ideology of containment that grew out of it.

Even before Fidel Castro declared that his regime was socialist in May 1961, Mexican intelligence agents lumped the Cuban government and its representatives into the Soviets’ “international communist conspiracy” and suspected the Cubans of involvement in Mexican affairs. In September 1960, the air attaché of the Cuban embassy told security officials that some of his co-workers were involved in numerous subversive movements within Mexico. They provided opposition groups with encouragement, economic help, and “communist orientation.” He claimed that students from his country who were members of the Communist Youth traveled to Mexico to agitate among students there. He accused Cuban officials of providing propaganda to railroad workers. He also explained that his embassy had close ties to its Soviet counterpart and received instructions from the Russians.²¹

By the time the embassy official made his confession, the Mexican government had already accused the Soviets of interfering in labor disputes. A campaign in the national media blamed the 1958-59 railroad workers’ movement on communist subversion. The Mexican government expelled two Soviet diplomats in April 1959.²²

²⁰ George Kennan, “[Long Telegram],” February 22, 1946, National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>. For the most recent study of Kennan, see John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

²¹ “[interview of a Cuban embassy official],” September 22, 1960, DFS, Exp 76-3-60, Leg. 1, Exp 229.

²² Rodrigo Garcia Treviño, “La huelga antiobrera y los comunistas morganáticos,” *Excelsior*, March 3, 1959; “Vallejo perdió y dice que triunfó,” *Excelsior*, March 22, 1959; “Paralización antipatriótica,” *Excelsior*, March 26, 1959, sec. Editorial; Bernardo Ponce, “Perspectiva: Táctica comunista,” *Excelsior*, March 26, 1959, sec. Editorial; Raul Beethoven Lomeli, “Reconquista sindical por los comunistas,” *Excelsior*, March 27, 1959; “La agitación comunizante,” *Excelsior*, March 28, 1959, sec. Editorial; “Amagaron mutilar a los que no pararan: Antecedentes que justifican la acción oficial,” *Excelsior*, March

Police told reporters that the diplomats had given union leader Demetrio Vallejo financial support and had helped him travel around the country fomenting unrest.²³

Highly placed government officials used third parties to make their most controversial accusations. Conservative ideologue Mario Guerra Leal asserted in his memoirs that, on orders from López Mateos, he accepted one hundred thousand pesos in February 1959 to write articles denouncing Vallejo and Lázaro Cárdenas. According to Guerra Leal, the secretary of defense conveyed the president's request and told him to write that Cárdenas "was meeting with Vallejo, that he is deceiving the railroad workers... in sum, that he is a traitor, not only to President López Mateos but also to Mexico."²⁴ On other occasions, the secretary of defense allegedly instructed Guerra Leal to write articles about communist involvement in the railroad movement.²⁵ The obliging ideologue submitted his work to the president's secretary for approval and then gave the articles to the press. He used money from the government to pay the newspapers to publish his incendiary declarations.²⁶

29, 1959; "El gobierno no podía tolerar tanto desorden," *Excélsior*, March 29, 1959; "Traicionó la buena fe del gobierno: Mientras estaban en pláticas, Vallejo ordenó el paro total," *Excélsior*, March 29, 1959; "Un ambiente de terror habían implantado los líderes ferroviarios," *Excélsior*, March 29, 1959; Rodrigo Garcia Treviño, "Motivos y fines del caos ferroviario," *Excélsior*, March 30, 1959, sec. editorial; Alfonso Serrano I., "Obedecían consignas internacionales en su labor de agitación, Vallejo y sus adictos," *Excélsior*, March 30, 1959; Bernardo Ponce, "Perspectiva: Sirviendo al monstruo," *Excélsior*, March 30, 1959, sec. editorial.

²³ Alfonso Serrano I., "Decide México la expulsión de dos diplomáticos soviéticos: Estaban implicados en la conjura Vallejista," *Excélsior*, April 1, 1959.

²⁴ Mario Guerra Leal, *La grilla* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1978). For the complete text of Guerra Leal's declarations against Cárdenas and Vallejo, see "Señala Guerra Leal el plan de Cárdenas," *El Universal* (Mexico City, February 23, 1959).

²⁵ Guerra Leal, *La grilla*, 144-145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

The articles that the Mexican government most likely planted about Soviet intervention in the railroad strikes reveal that information in Mexico about communism operated in a closed circuit. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz knew that many of the leaders of the railroad strikes, including Demetrio Vallejo and Valentín Campa, were communists. They drew the conclusion, or at least promoted the idea, that because Vallejo and Campa were communists, the strikes resulted from communist infiltration rather than from problems in the nation's labor system. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz told the media to propagate the theory of communist—and Soviet—interference in Mexico's railroad industry, and the newspapers complied.²⁷

The misinformation did not stop there. Intelligence agents culled the news for reports about communism—the papers, after all, were one of their primary sources of information—and read the articles that other government employees had planted about Soviet involvement in the strikes. A few months after the resolution of the railroad strikes, the head of the Department of Federal Security submitted a report that the secretary general of the Confederation of Cuban Workers and member of the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba, David Salvador Manzo, was visiting Mexico. The intelligence director claimed that Salvador Manzo had made various trips to the Soviet Union prior to his arrival in Mexico and that he was a “close friend” of Demetrio Vallejo.²⁸ The security report reproduced and reinforced the belief that the Russians had played a role in Mexico's labor unrest and that they were using Cuban go-betweens to do so. The

²⁷ On the Mexican media's subservience to the government, see Chapter Two of this dissertation. On the circular nature of information in Mexico, see Evelyn Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974); Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

²⁸ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[arrival of Cuban propagandist and labor activist],” August 28, 1959, DFS, Exp 12-9-59, Leg 4, Hoja 130, AGN.

confession that the attaché to the Cuban Embassy made a year later only added to the impression that the Cubans and the Soviets were trying to embroil Mexico in a worldwide communist conspiracy.

Echoing George Kennan's warning about Soviet manipulation of "democratic-progressive agencies," many of the intelligence reports claimed that the Cubans and Soviets had connections with leftist organizations and parties within Mexico. In 1963, a DFS agent, in a report about the People's Electoral Front, informed his superiors about "communist activities" in the states of Veracruz, Chiapas, and Oaxaca. According to the official, a clandestine guerrilla group in possession of Czechoslovakian weapons had installed itself in those three states. The weapons supposedly came from Cuba. The intelligence agent suspected that the guerrillas were receiving instructions from communist members of the Popular Socialist Party in Mexico City and from a naturalized Spaniard of Czech origin, Alfredo Hirsch Bumenthal. Hirsch, in addition to working for various Mexican insurance companies, was also rumored to be a Soviet spy who operated in worldwide espionage circles under the alias "Mink." The intelligence report described him as "the most dangerous and important communist agent in Mexico." It claimed that he "directly serves the Czechoslovakian and Soviet Embassies, from which he receives instructions." The agent explained that Hirsch's work in the field of insurance facilitated his "labors of espionage and subversion." In the margins of the report someone, perhaps Díaz Ordaz, scrawled: "*Se investiga*"—under investigation.²⁹ The DFS agent's superiors might not have believed his claims automatically, but they were willing to take them into consideration.

²⁹ Ricardo Ruiz Hidalgo, "Asunto: FEP," September 3, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 3, Hoja 112, AGN.

Agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations drew numerous connections between Mexican “agitators” and the Soviet Union and Cuba. In 1964, the IPS compiled a sixteen-page list on the background and activities of communist agitators, including leaders and members of the Mexican Communist Party, the Independent Campesino Center, and the People’s Electoral Front, as well as various student, worker, campesino, and guerrilla groups. Of the eighty-seven agitators, fifteen had reportedly traveled to Cuba, Russia, or both. Five others frequently attended events or meetings at the embassies of socialist countries in Mexico City. The author or authors of the report claimed that one of the founders of the MLN, CCI, and FEP made trips to Moscow, China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Cuba. The report described a leader of the Mexican Communist Party and founding member of the National Liberation Movement, Independent Campesino Center, and People’s Electoral Front as an “assiduous visitor to the embassies of the socialist countries.” Another member of the communist party reportedly made several trips to Cuba and frequently visited the socialist embassies.³⁰

Mexican army officials also submitted reports about connections between Cuba and leftist organizations in Mexico. Shortly before the 1964 presidential elections, one officer claimed that the cultural relations-oriented Cuban-Mexican Institute in Mexico City was “organizing a POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY ARMY OF MEXICO” [emphasis in original]. The revolutionary army supposedly consisted of a national commander, guerrilla groups in various state capitals, and two national subcommanders. According to the report, two Mexican professors had recently returned from receiving guerrilla training in Cuba. Apparently the army had known about one of the professors’ presence in Cuba as early as 1960 and had assigned his brother, a sergeant, to a post in

³⁰ “Antecedentes y actividades de elementos agitadores comunistas,” 1964, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN.

Baja California to prevent contact between the two men.³¹ The army official concluded that Mexico was the target of an international communist conspiracy.

Reports of Mexicans going to Cuba and the Soviet Union for training continued to arrive in the ministry of the interior during Díaz Ordaz's presidency. In 1966, IPS agents claimed that the Independent Campesino Center was sending groups to the Soviet Union to learn subversive techniques.³² This accusation was reminiscent of the outlandish warnings about "pro-Soviet communist traps" and "peasant dictatorships" published in the media frenzy that resulted from the formation of the CCI three years earlier.³³ It is likely that the intelligence agents had read the articles accusing the new campesino organization of Soviet cooperation, in yet another example of the circular nature of information within Mexico. Also in 1966, DFS agents compiled a list of eight members of Mexican "radical leftist groups" who were in Cuba and about to depart for Moscow, where they would study guerrilla warfare before returning to Mexico.³⁴ That same year, the Judicial Police reported that the leader of the Independent Campesino Center, Ramón Danzós Palomino, was about to leave for Havana to attend a worldwide peasant congress. There, the Cubans would give him a "revolutionary orientation" with regard to

³¹ "[Cuban-Mexican Institute organizing an army]," July 3, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 10, Hoja 173, AGN.

³² "Actividades de la Central Campesina Independiente," July 3, 1966, IPS Caja 1022, AGN.

³³ "Trampa comunista para campesinos: Futurismo político prosoviético," *Excelsior*, January 8, 1963, sec. Editorial; "El gran chantaje político; Quién da el dinero a los 'campesinos'?", *Excelsior*, January 9, 1963, sec. Editorial.

³⁴ "[list of leftists receiving guerrilla training in the USSR]," August 25, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-4-66, Leg. 17, Hoja 104, AGN.

campesino activism. Danzós would presumably use this training to plan the “great land invasion movement” that his organization was preparing for the following year.³⁵

According to intelligence agents, the Mexican Communist Party, obeying the dictates of the Soviets, had left its fingerprints all over leftist agitation in the 1950s and 60s. A short biography that IPS investigators composed in 1967 about the head of the PCM, Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, claimed that he “served international communism as the coordinator of propaganda in Latin America.” This “professional agitator” had reportedly received training in Russia in 1955 and 1959. He participated in international congresses in Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, and Cuba and frequently attended events in the Cuban and Soviet embassies. Perhaps drawing on this extensive training, Martínez Verdugo helped direct the CCI and FEP. He played a large role in various student protest movements.³⁶ Intelligence agents attached Martínez Verdugo’s biography to a longer report about the National Center of Democratic Students (CNED), a group that government agents saw as one of the primary instigators of the 1968 student movement. The report about the student group claimed that it was an extremist, subversive organization affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party that received instructions from Prague and Havana.³⁷

Claims that communists in Mexico obeyed the dictates of an international Soviet conspiracy that operated through Cuba probably had an ambivalent effect on López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz. On the one hand, such information would have supported the

³⁵ Policía Judicial Federal, “[CCI planning agitation with help from Cuba],” October 6, 1966, Fondo Presidencial de Gustavo Díaz Ordaz [hereafter GDO] 206 (125), AGN.

³⁶ “Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo,” July 4, 1967, IPS Caja 2892 A, AGN.

³⁷ “Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos,” May 4, 1968, IPS Caja 2892 A, AGN. More on the CNED in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

argument that Mexico should cut relations with Cuba, so as to stifle further travel and cooperation between communists and other leftists in the two countries. On the other hand, this tactic would only work if extreme leftist agitation in Mexico were entirely dependent upon foreign direction. Mexican leaders did not believe this to be the case. Reports about the Mexican Left's ties to Cuba demonstrated the importance of the Cuban cause to some Mexican citizens who were already pre-disposed to oppositional activities. By maintaining relations with Cuba, Mexican leaders hoped to gain favor among those members of the domestic population.

COMMUNIST INFILTRATION

One of the threats that Mexican leaders feared was that of communist infiltration. Intelligence agents told their superiors that Marxists were sneaking into the police, the government, and the PRI. The number and urgency of the reports of communist infiltration increased throughout the decade after the Cuban Revolution, especially after Díaz Ordaz assumed the presidency in 1964. Intelligence agents and police officers saw this form of subversive activity as especially insidious, as it entailed corruption from within. They worried that the government was being turned against itself. Ironically, by being so suspicious of their government's institutions, the DFS, IPS, and Federal Police were actually the ones turning against their own.

Police organizations topped the list of suspected targets of communist infiltration. In October 1961, four DFS agents reported on a meeting of the newly formed National Liberation Movement. One of the members of the group reportedly told the others: "in Uruapan, Michoacán, all of the police belong to this movement and dedicate themselves

to posting its propaganda throughout the city.”³⁸ It was possible, though unlikely, that the police in Uruapan really did join the MLN. Michoacán was Lázaro Cárdenas’s home state, after all, and the general, who publicly promoted the movement, still possessed a great deal of clout in the area. It is also possible that the police in Uruapan were merely pretending to sympathize with the movement in order to keep a closer eye on it. Or the speaker who made the claim could have been lying to impress the others present at the meeting. Finally, the authors of the DFS report could have made the whole thing up in order to exaggerate the movement’s threat and thus justify their own work. The question of the Uruapan police’s loyalties demonstrates the ambiguous nature of both the “communist threat” and the intelligence reports.

Less than a year later, another security official reported that the National Liberation Movement was forming its own police group in Chiapas. He claimed to have overheard a conversation between Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of the former president and one of the leaders of the MLN, and another unidentified person. Cárdenas learned in this conversation that “in the state of Chiapas, the National Liberation Movement had formed a police group called the G2.”³⁹ According to the report, the MLN was using its “G2” police to control campesinos in Chiapas by forcing them to join their organization.

So-called communist front organizations like the MLN were not the only ones suspected of infiltrating or mimicking police groups. In 1965, Agent 399 of the Federal Police reported that members of the Mexican Communist Party had been overheard

³⁸ José Correa Patiño et al., “Movimiento de Liberación Nacional,” October 17, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 5, Hoja 31, AGN.

³⁹ Abelardo Montaña Ramírez, “[MLN activities in Chiapas],” July 28, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 8, Hoja 28, AGN. The term “G2” is shorthand for both the U.S. military intelligence office within the War Department and the Cuban National Security and Intelligence Department.

discussing the success of their efforts to infiltrate police organizations. “They have managed to occupy posts in the different police organizations throughout the entire country, principally those of Mexico City,” the agent stated.⁴⁰ The leaders of the communist party were reportedly satisfied with the information that they received from their spies in the police groups. The communists said they were having more trouble infiltrating the national army but were slowly making headway. Agent 399 implied that the government needed to act quickly, before the communists could gain further footholds among the police and armed forces.

Intelligence agents and police officers also suspected the communists of infiltrating the government. In 1965, the Federal Police reported in their daily summary of political developments that the leader of a “Marxist” group called the National Center of Democratic Students was “seeking the help of the communists that [had] infiltrated the different state governments.” This assistance consisted of supporting demonstrations and providing money “with the premeditated goal of occupying an official post that would facilitate the spreading of Marxist-Leninist theories.”⁴¹ The report implied that the communists had already penetrated numerous state governments.

Also in 1965, a member of the Federal Police reported that communists had infiltrated sectors of the national government and were using their positions for subversive purposes. According to the agent, leaders of the Mexican Communist Party had ordered their followers in the Department of Agrarian Affairs to incite divisions among their co-workers. He claimed that the infiltrators were known agitators who had

⁴⁰ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #399, “[Communist infiltration of police],” July 21, 1965, GDO 204 (123), AGN.

⁴¹ Policia Judicial Federal, “Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos,” April 5, 1965, GDO 203 (122), AGN.

been previously jailed for participating in the railroad workers' movement.⁴² The same agent, number 399, reported a week later that the PCM was infiltrating police organizations throughout the country.⁴³ He either genuinely believed in the communist threat or wrote what he thought that his superiors wanted to hear.

The PRI, the official government party, was another suspected target of communist infiltration. In 1966, the head of the Department of Federal Security investigated claims made in an article in the newspaper *Últimas Noticias* titled "Communist Infiltration in the PRI." The article had maintained that communists embedded in the youth wing of the party were planning to take over the organization at the upcoming national congress. Its author did not hesitate to include names. The head of intelligence wrote a report to his supervisor, Díaz Ordaz, providing information about all of the suspected infiltrators identified in the article. He corroborated the claims that some of the leaders of the PRI's youth group were "radicals." He described one as a leftist agitator who traveled to Cuba and published a magazine funded by the National Liberation Movement. Another youth named in the article also collaborated with the MLN.⁴⁴ The head of intelligence left it to his supervisor's discretion to draw conclusions about the veracity of the article and its warnings of infiltration.

Not even the country's most prominent politicians escaped suspicion. In 1966, Agent 430 of the Federal Police warned that the communists might be forming an alliance with three powerful men. These were Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, who had recently

⁴² Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #399, "[communists in the Agrarian Department]," July 15, 1965, GDO 204 (123), AGN.

⁴³ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #399, "[communist infiltration of police]."

⁴⁴ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[possible communist infiltration of the PRI]," February 11, 1966, DFS, Exp 48-4-66, Leg. 9, Hoja 245, AGN.

renounced his position as chief of the Department of the Federal District (a position roughly equivalent to mayor of Washington D.C.), Carlos A. Madrazo, who had renounced his post as president of the PRI, and Dr. Ignacio Chávez, who had resigned as president of the national university. According to the police report, the three disaffected political leaders were working with the communists to “cause the most serious problems to the current regime of President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and seize political control of the country in the next presidential term.” The information came from “a prominent source in Congress who demonstrated, from various angles, that this alliance is not absurd, but actually has many reasons for being entirely viable.” Agent 430 also referred to earlier reports in which he had warned that Uruchurtu possessed vast wealth and probably planned to use it to return to the political scene “disguised” as the editor of a newspaper.⁴⁵ Perhaps some Mexican Machiavelli in Congress was trying to use the police agent to wave the red flag of “communist infiltration” in order to discredit his competitors.

Two months later, the same police official passed along an article about communism in Mexico published by the *U.S. News and World Report*, demonstrating once again the circular nature of information sharing between the press and the intelligence services. He attached his own reflections and comments. The article, titled “The Reds are Heating Up Mexico,” blamed the recent increase in “subversive” student and campesino activism across Mexico on “red agitators” and the Cuban Embassy.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁵ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #430, “[communist alliance with important politicians],” October 27, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁴⁶ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #430, “[U.S. press coverage of communism in Mexico],” December 1, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

author of the article took care to point out that Mexico was the only Latin American country that recognized Castro's regime.

Agent 430 of the Federal Police reported that people who had read the *U.S. News* article considered it a poorly disguised form of pressure from the U.S. government to induce Mexico to cut relations with Cuba. He also mentioned that the article contained "very interesting information" that had not been published in Mexican newspapers.⁴⁷ He could have been implying that the media was withholding information from the public—which it frequently did—or that Mexican intelligence agencies were sharing information with the United States—also a common occurrence.⁴⁸ The report suggested that many of the article's claims about communist infiltration and subversion had merit.

AGITATION AND SUBVERSION

Another of intelligence agents' most common warnings was that communists and other leftists were agitating the public and subverting the national order. Members of the press, community organizations, and other government officials added to the outcry. The categories of "agitation" and "subversion" were vague enough to encompass any number of oppositional activities, from distributing propaganda and organizing rallies to hoarding weapons and organizing terrorist brigades. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz heard from multiple sources that communists and other leftists threatened to create trouble across the country.

One of the greatest "agitators" of the early 1960s was Rubén Jaramillo, an agrarian leader whose activism dated back decades. According to historian Tanalís

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ On censorship of the Mexican newspapers, see Chapter Two of this dissertation. On cooperation between Mexican and U.S. intelligence services, see Chapter Six.

Padilla, "the Jaramillista struggle had its origins in Zapata's agrarianism, took form with Cárdenas's populism, and was transformed with the renewed hope for radical change inspired throughout Latin America by the Cuban Revolution."⁴⁹A veteran of the Mexican Revolution who had served under Emiliano Zapata, Rubén Jaramillo led the residents of Morelos in a drawn-out, multi-faceted struggle for the state support promised them in the nation's constitution.

After years of trying to work within the Mexican legal framework to defend campesino interests, Jaramillo and his followers sought other methods. They first took up the rifles that they had saved from the revolution and took to the hills in 1942, when state officials violently quashed a strike that the Jaramillistas had led at a sugar cooperative. The federal government issued the group an official pardon a year later, and Jaramillo ran for state governor in 1946. The PRI candidate won and governmental repression forced the agrarian leader back into hiding to begin his second armed uprising. In 1951, the cycle repeated itself: the Jaramillistas left the mountains, participated in the following year's elections, and returned to clandestine armed struggle to escape repression. This third, more radical, uprising lasted six years, until Adolfo López Mateos pardoned Jaramillo in 1959.⁵⁰

Upon returning to the public scene, Jaramillo once again began creating problems for the government. He and six thousand campesinos initiated proceedings to establish a community on vacant *ejido*, or communal, territories in western Morelos. They requested land, loans, roads, housing, and electricity. Unfortunately for them, powerful

⁴⁹ Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priísta, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

entrepreneurs in Mexico City coveted the same location for an industrial project. The Jaramillistas “invaded” the land while the ownership of the area was still under dispute, built interim houses, and began planting crops. The government sided with the entrepreneurs and rescinded the approval it had granted Jaramillo’s group. Soldiers intervened to remove the campesinos.⁵¹

During the same period, Jaramillo’s group began radicalizing its strategies and building broad alliances. They offered solidarity to striking railroad workers and teachers. Jaramillo joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1961 and participated in rallies organized by the National Liberation Movement.⁵² That year, the head of the Department of Federal Security reported that the agrarian leader received help from local MLN leaders in Cuernavaca and from the Cuban ambassador to Mexico. The intelligence agent claimed that Jaramillo had invaded a parcel of land in Morelos along with a group of campesinos, whom he “charged five pesos weekly each, with the promise that they would soon gain the titles to the property.”⁵³ The DFS report implied that Jaramillo might be conning the very peasants whom he purported to help.

Other Jaramillistas advocated a strategy of clandestine organizing. This included political education and the creation of a “socialist region” and a “people’s revolutionary army.”⁵⁴ A growing faction argued for the creation of cells, or small groups, that would

⁵¹ Ibid., 194.

⁵² Ibid., 10, 198; “La nación: La matanza de Xochicalco,” *Política*, June 1, 1962; Castellanos, *México armado 1943-1981*.

⁵³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[agitation in Morelos],” October 12, 1961, DFS, Exp 100-15-3-61, Leg. 1, Hoja 1, AGN.

⁵⁴ Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*, 201-202.

secretly receive training and instructions from Jaramillo for use in their own local communities. The cells could expand into cooperatives, which would then slowly establish a socialist region with a revolutionary consciousness. The political education would come from Jaramillo himself. By sharing his knowledge, he could “create many Rubéns,” as one Jaramillista explained, and thus decrease the movement’s dependence on a single leader.⁵⁵ This radical sector of the Jaramillista movement anticipated governmental repression and planned to form a revolutionary army for self-defense. In her book on the Jaramillistas, Tanalís Padilla contends that Mexico’s intelligence agencies were probably aware of at least some of these incipient plans.

Eventually, the government decided to put a definitive end to Rubén Jaramillo’s “subversive” activities. On May 23, 1962, around sixty soldiers and several armed civilians surrounded Jaramillo’s house and seized him along with his pregnant wife and three sons. His family displayed the official pardons that López Mateos had granted Jaramillo, but the officer in charge stuffed the paper into his pocket and continued with his assignment. In the confusion, Jaramillo’s stepdaughter escaped. The rest of Jaramillo’s family was not so lucky. Their bodies turned up riddled with bullets a few hours later beside an archaeological site known as the Xochicalco ruins, near Cuernavaca.⁵⁶

Jaramillo’s death was not enough to quiet the fears of the intelligence community. Less than two weeks after the “Massacre of Xochicalco,” the head of the Department of Federal Security compiled a list of twenty-one people who were still loyal to the agrarian

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

leader.⁵⁷ At the bottom of the list were two Cubans, one of whom was said to be a commander of the Cuban army and a member of the National Liberation Movement. Four days later, the head of the DFS reported that Jaramillo's sympathizers in Morelos were continuing to hold secret meetings.⁵⁸ The same commander of the Cuban army supposedly attended all of these gatherings.

Three days later, another DFS agent submitted a more detailed report about this "Cuban" infiltrator. "He uses various names," the Mexican official claimed, and "has for a number of years worked for the Cuban G2." According to this report, the so-called Cuban commander was actually a Mexican communist who had come into contact with Fidel Castro's followers during their exile in Mexico. Once Castro seized power, the Mexican communist became a spy for him and worked in Veracruz under direction from Castro's embassy in Mexico City. In early 1962, still following orders from the embassy, he had moved to Cuernavaca and established contact with members of the National Liberation Movement. The DFS agent said that the spy was trying to leave the country, possibly aboard a Cuban ship.⁵⁹ These reports reveal the fear that intelligence agents felt about cooperation among leftist groups such as the Jaramillistas, the MLN, and the Cubans for subversive purposes.

The National Liberation Movement and other leftist groups and leaders did, in fact, denounce Jaramillo's murder and take up his cause. Two weeks after Jaramillo's

⁵⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Jaramillo sympathizers]," June 2, 1962, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 337, AGN.

⁵⁸ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Cuban connections with Jaramillo supporters]," June 6, 1962, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 341, AGN.

⁵⁹ Guillermo Naranjo, "[G2 connections with Jaramillo and the MLN]," June 9, 1962, DFS, Exp 12-9-62, Leg 12, Hoja 65, AGN.

death, Lázaro Cárdenas publicly condemned the assassination of the agrarian leader at a regional assembly of the MLN in Zamora, Michoacán.⁶⁰ Hundreds of workers, campesinos, and others present observed a moment of silence in Jaramillo's memory. According to an article in a local Morelos newspaper, Cárdenas had also offered his home as refuge for the daughter of Rubén Jaramillo.⁶¹ The article about the whereabouts of Jaramillo's daughter did not escape the notice of the intelligence agents, who clipped a copy for their records.

Even two years after Jaramillo's assassination, intelligence agents continued to watch for efforts by leftist agitators to use his image for subversive purposes. In 1964, Agent 631 of the Department of Federal Security reported that students from four states were planning to meet in Cuernavaca, Morelos. They were allegedly planning to dynamite a statue of Jaramillo that the government had erected. According to the agent's source, this violent act of public vandalism would set off a communist movement in time to disrupt the campaign visit of the official presidential candidate, Díaz Ordaz. Agent 631 also implicated leaders of the People's Electoral Front, the Independent Campesino Center, the National Liberation Movement, and the Mexican Communist Party in the plot.⁶² No statues exploded, however, and Díaz Ordaz delivered his speech in Cuernavaca as planned. In November 1964, the head of the DFS reported that the National Liberation Movement was holding screenings of a documentary about Jaramillo by prominent

⁶⁰ "Don Lázaro habló en la asamblea del Movimiento de Liberación en Zamora," *La Voz de Michoacán*, May 29, 1962.

⁶¹ "Salió del estado la hija de Rubén Jaramillo, dicen: Fue a refugiarse a la casa del General Lázaro Cárdenas," *Diario de Morelos*, May 29, 1962.

⁶² Agente #631, "[Student Revolutionary Movement]," May 30, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-4-64, Leg. 12, Hoja 293, AGN.

intellectual Carlos Monsiváis. According to the agent, the MLN had shown the movie “to campesinos in almost the entire north of the country.”⁶³

Spreading information about Rubén Jaramillo was not the only “subversive” activity that the National Liberation Movement was undertaking among the peasantry, according to reports that Mexico’s leaders received from numerous sources. In 1962, the League of Agrarian Communities and Campesino Syndicates of Zitácuaro, Michoacán, wrote to López Mateos complaining about the MLN. “Allow me to communicate to you the great labor of agitation that has been taking place within the Agrarian Communities of this region by the party of National Liberation,” read the letter. “[The movement] has been causing disorientation, confusion, and, as a consequence, division among the campesinos that later may become a serious problem.”⁶⁴ According to the outraged peasant league of Zitácuaro, the MLN was spreading propaganda and inviting campesinos to meetings and gatherings, all with the collusion of the town mayor.

In 1963, the Federation of Workers and Campesinos of the Region of Chietla wrote to López Mateos to denounce activities of the National Liberation Movement and Mexican Communist Party in Puebla. The letter warned that the MLN and PCM, in cooperation with Lázaro Cárdenas and functionaries from the Department of Agrarian Affairs, were “undertaking a labor of disorientation” against the government’s agrarian program.⁶⁵ According to the federation, the subversive groups were organizing demonstrations and fabricating census documents. These letters and others indicated to

⁶³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN documentary about Jaramillo],” November 19, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-6-64, Leg. 13, Hoja 206, AGN.

⁶⁴ “[letter to López Mateos complaining about MLN in Michoacán],” June 19, 1962, ALM 433/408, AGN.

⁶⁵ “[letter about MLN agitation in Puebla],” February 7, 1963, ALM 542.2/210(3), AGN.

Mexican leaders that concern about the National Liberation Movement was not only limited to government officials and employees but was widespread among the public as well.

Some of the government's foremost informants worried that the National Liberation Movement was preparing to undertake violent subversion. The chief of the Presidential Guard of the Ministry of National Defense submitted a report to Díaz Ordaz about MLN activities in the state of Sinaloa in 1962. He claimed that a local newspaper called *El Liberal* was practicing "agitation and social dissolution." The newspaper of "communist tendencies" was trying to drive a wedge between the public and the army and obeying the dictates of a pre-conceived plan. An informant had seen the local head of the National Liberation Movement and owner of *El Liberal* meeting with the MLN's national leaders in the editorial offices of his paper. The source also suspected the newspaper owner of receiving propaganda from the movement as well as instructions on the formation of shock brigades and the fabrication of Molotov cocktails.⁶⁶

In 1960s Mexico, "social dissolution" was a loosely-defined crime under Article 145 of the nation's Federal Penal Code. The government used the provision to jail critics and detractors whose actions disturbed public order or affected the sovereignty of the Mexican state.⁶⁷ The Chief of the Presidential Guard claimed in his report that the Sinaloa newspaper's acts of social dissolution had caused "throughout the region, a climate of agitation and antagonism between people and organizations." He attributed tensions between various local workers' groups to the news of "insidious slander" and

⁶⁶ Miguel Hernández Palacios, "[subversive activities in Sinaloa]," November 10, 1962, IPS Caja 2898 A, AGN.

⁶⁷ On the crime of social dissolution, see Evelyn P. Stevens, "Legality and Extra-Legality in Mexico," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 1970): 62-75.

calls for dissolution printed on a regular basis in *El Liberal*.⁶⁸ The chief of the Presidential Guard painted a rather frightening picture of unbridled leftist agitation in Sinaloa. By specifically warning about “social dissolution” in his report, he also provided the government with legal grounds for prosecuting the owner of the newspaper.

An international event prompted a great deal of paranoia about the National Liberation Movement and other leftist organizations. At the end of June 1962, U.S. president John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie made a state visit to Mexico, where they received an extravagant welcome complete with a ticker-tape parade. The Mexican government went to great lengths to insure the success of the visit. Intelligence agents compiled lists of “dangerous elements” to “watch and control” during Kennedy’s stay.⁶⁹ The dangerous elements included at least forty-five members of the Mexican Communist Party, the Confederation of Latin American Workers, the Popular Socialist Party, the General Union of Mexican Workers and Campesinos, the National Liberation Movement, and others. Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Lázaro Cárdenas’s son, Cuauhtémoc, made the list.

The Mexican government and intelligence services kept their U.S. counterparts abreast of all security measures for Kennedy’s visit. According to a memo by the counselor for political affairs of the U.S. embassy, the Mexican security agencies reassured the Americans that they planned to round up known “troublemakers and Communist agitators” throughout the country and closely follow the movements of MLN

⁶⁸ Hernández Palacios, “[subversive activities in Sinaloa].”

⁶⁹ Luis Ramirez López et al., “[list of people to watch and control during Kennedy’s visit],” May 17, 1962, DFS, Exp 30-3-62, Leg. 2, Hoja 23, AGN.

members prior to Kennedy's arrival.⁷⁰ The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Thomas C. Mann, reported that the Mexican government planned to raid places where pamphlets and other propaganda denouncing the visit were stored and offered to search any other locations that the U.S. embassy wished.⁷¹

The Mexican security services kept their promises. In a telegram written to the secretary of state after the visit, Mann observed that Mexican police had "arrested and incarcerated a considerable number of possible trouble makers including certain communist students and communist leaders" prior to Kennedy's arrival and kept a much larger number of people under surveillance. Police and intelligence agents also watched over "possible trouble areas" such as universities, Soviet bloc embassies, and the U.S. embassy. They followed instructions to destroy derogatory signs and to prevent any groups of students from leaving the grounds of the National Autonomous University (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM). The police dispersed four truckloads of students attempting to leave the UNAM campus, as well as a group of demonstrators along the parade route.⁷² Thanks to these measures, Kennedy's visit proceeded smoothly.

Another major event—the 1964 elections—prompted worries within Mexican governmental circles about leftist agitation and subversion. On April 6, the visit of the official presidential candidate, Díaz Ordaz, prompted a riot in Chihuahua. After the

⁷⁰ Robert W. Adams, "Communist Activity Related to Forthcoming Visit by President Kennedy," May 31, 1962, National Security Files, Trips and Conferences, Box 237, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston [hereafter JFK Library].

⁷¹ Thomas Mann, "Presidential Visit," June 25, 1962, National Security Files, Trips and Conferences, Box 237, JFK Library.

⁷² Thomas Mann, "Kennedy Visit Security Measures," July 2, 1962, National Security Files, Trips and Conferences, Box 237, JFK Library.

speeches ended, a commotion broke out and the crowd of ten thousand people set fire to the front of the city hall and assaulted Díaz Ordaz's hotel. He suffered a minor injury when a piece of wood struck him on the head.⁷³

State officials took measures to avoid further disturbances. A few days after the incident in Chihuahua, the governor of Guerrero sent a telegram to the interim minister of the interior, Luis Echeverría. He requested advice on dealing with "extreme leftist" plans to agitate against the state government.⁷⁴ Two months later, on the eve of the elections, the same governor sent another telegram. This time, he passed along recommendations from a local authority that some recently active subversives be "relocated" to another state or part of the country until the elections had passed. He also mentioned that "seeds" of the People's Electoral Front were present in the city of Álvarez, where recent acts of agitation had taken place.⁷⁵ Intelligence agents in the Department of Political and Social Investigations reported that in Cuernavaca, Morelos, youth members of the People's Electoral Front and the Mexican Communist Party were planning to sabotage Díaz Ordaz's campaign visit. The IPS agent warned that the FEP had a "plan of agitation that obey[ed] the orders of the Mexican Communist Party."⁷⁶

Also leading up to the 1964 elections, IPS agents compiled a list of "Antecedents and Activities of Communist Agitators." They noted which so-called "communist elements" had criticized the official presidential candidate. The national secretary of the

⁷³ "Leading Mexican Candidate is Hurt in Campaign Riot," *New York Times*, April 8, 1964. CIA, "Mexico," May 1, 1964, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

⁷⁴ Dr. Raymundo Abarca Alarcon, "[extreme leftist agitators]," April 9, 1964, IPS Caja 2851 A, AGN.

⁷⁵ Dr. Raymundo Abarca Alarcon, "[electoral agitation]," June 29, 1964, IPS Caja 2851 A, AGN.

⁷⁶ "[FEP and PCM electoral agitation]," June 4, 1964, IPS Caja 444, Exp 1, AGN.

Independent Campesino Center, who had made frequent trips to Cuba, had “attacked Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in a constant manner, insinuating that he might assault him.” A member of the People’s Electoral Front, Independent Campesino Center, and National Liberation Movement reportedly “attacked the President of the Republic and Díaz Ordaz in a constant manner. In his discourses, he incited [his audience] to subversion in a similar form to that of Fidel Castro Ruz.”⁷⁷

In addition to criticizing the official presidential candidate, the people on the list of communist agitators engaged in numerous other subversive activities. Dolores Vidrio, a member of the CCI and FEP, organized groups of teachers, railroad workers, and women. She had also played an active role in the Vallejista railroad workers’ movement of 1958-59. Another member of the PCM and MLN had publicly defended Vallejo and “intervened in workers’ strikes and [sought] to remove syndicates from the Confederation of Mexican Workers.” Manuel Terrazas Guerrero, head of the Mexican Communist Party and founding member of the National Liberation Movement, Independent Campesino Center, and People’s Electoral Front, reportedly traveled throughout the country agitating among workers and campesinos and installing communist committees and cells. Many of the agitators were said to “enjoy influence” among the student sector.⁷⁸ The list summarized the sorts of activities, organizations, and affiliations that government leaders considered dangerous and told their intelligence agents to observe. It also demonstrated the overlap between the leftist opposition groups; many of the people on the list were members and leaders of multiple organizations.

⁷⁷ “Antecedentes y actividades de elementos agitadores comunistas.”

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Even after the 1964 elections proceeded as planned and Díaz Ordaz became president, government leaders and their agents did not lower their guard against the communist menace. On the night of April 12, 1965, the government struck back against many of the people and organizations on the list of “communist agitators.” Approximately seventy-five agents of the Secret Service and Federal Police simultaneously raided the offices of the Mexican Communist Party, the Independent Campesino Center, and the People’s Electoral Front and arrested thirty “subversive” leaders.⁷⁹ Among those arrested were Manuel Terrazas Guerrero, Arnaldo Martínez Verdugo, Hugo Ponce de León, and Gilberto Rincón Gallardo, whom one newspaper article called the “visible heads of communism in Mexico.”⁸⁰ Police interrogated the detainees, asking them about their organizational affiliations, their participation in demonstrations, and their future plans.⁸¹

Government officials claimed that they suspected those arrested of formulating a sinister plot. According to an article in *La Prensa*, they accused the Mexican Communist Party of initiating a “vast, multi-part plan that would culminate in June on the anniversary of the capitulation of the Vallejista [railroad workers] movement.”⁸² This plan reportedly included encouraging strikes in the rural teacher training schools, agitating in universities across the country, holding demonstrations protesting the Vietnam War, organizing a mass demonstration in the Zócalo to celebrate Worker’s Day on May 1, intensifying the

⁷⁹ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “raid on offices of the PCM, CCI, and FEP,” April 12, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-4-65, Leg. 13, Hoja 223, AGN.

⁸⁰ Fausto Zapata Loredo, “No ha habido más presos,” *La Prensa*, April 15, 1965.

⁸¹ “Rindieron declaración los treinta detenidos del PCM, el FEP, y la CCI,” *El Día*, April 15, 1965.

⁸² Fausto Zapata Loredo, “Prosigue la averiguación: Niegan todos los cargos,” *La Prensa*, April 15, 1965.

battle on behalf of the people still incarcerated from the railroad workers' movement, promoting strikes and work stoppages, and possibly engaging in direct action against the police. The detainees denied the charges and their organizations published protests about the arrests.⁸³

Government officials claimed that they were defending Mexico against an imminent threat. The district attorney told reporters that the raid and arrests were “absolutely necessary acts. These organizations threatened the stability and security of the country.”⁸⁴ The same official claimed that the Mexican Communist Party had approved the expenditure of ninety thousand pesos per month on the plot. Other implicated groups included the National Liberation Movement, the Popular Socialist Party, and Institute of Mexican-Cuban Cultural Exchange. An article in *La Prensa* claimed that police seized homemade bombs and five tons of communist propaganda during the raids. The subversives reportedly intended to use the stockpile for “a series of terrorist acts, such as setting off bombs in public buildings and in some embassies.” The article described Manuel Terrazas Guerrero as “possibly the most dangerous of the communists, as he is one of those most familiar with terrorist tactics.”⁸⁵

A few days after the arrests, the police's story unraveled. An article in *Novedades* declared that “order and tranquility” reigned throughout the country after the “center of

⁸³ “Conjura contra las libertades ciudadanas: Declaración del Movimiento de Liberación Nacional,” *Política*, April 15, 1965; “El asalto policiaco no lo impedirá: El Partido Comunista continua la lucha contra el imperialismo, por la democracia y por la paz: Exijamos la libertad de todos los detenidos!,” *La Voz de México*, April 18, 1965.

⁸⁴ Zapata Loredo, “Prosigue la averiguación: Niegan todos los cargos.”

⁸⁵ “Hallazgo: archivos y bombas,” *La Prensa*, April 14, 1965.

agitation had been opportunely controlled.”⁸⁶ After nine days, authorities released the jailed detainees, having found no basis for holding them.⁸⁷ This suggests that the police and intelligence agents had little evidence in the first place for their claims about a communist conspiracy and that the raid and arrests were intended to send a message rather than prevent any specific subversive actions.

Fear of communist subversion went so deep among Mexico’s security agents that even a *lack* of evidence could be interpreted as a communist plot. In April of 1967, a member of the federal judiciary police reported that the “meager success of the most recent acts organized by the Mexican Communist Party and other leftists is intentional, as they want to distract the authorities of the Capital and give them [false] confidence.” Once the authorities had let down their guard, believing that leftist groups were losing power, the communists would be free to agitate in other states of the republic, the agent contended.⁸⁸ This sort of logic negated the value of evidence and rested purely on speculation: the communists were planning to agitate the public, and any evidence to the contrary was a trick.

Mexico’s police, intelligence services, and governing elite perceived leftist or communist subversion as a real threat. Sometimes the challenge to authority was clear, as in the case of Rubén Jaramillo. Other times the methods of agitation appeared more insidious. Government agents were on a constant lookout for communist subversion, and they found it, invented it, or twisted the lack of evidence into conspiracy theories. In the

⁸⁶ “Controlado el foco de agitación, impera la tranquilidad en el país: Los 30 detenidos rindieron su declaración en la Procuraduría,” *Novedades*, April 15, 1965.

⁸⁷ “La conjura anticomunista,” *Política*, May 1, 1965.

⁸⁸ Policía Judicial Federal, “[communist plot],” April 26, 1967, GDO 207 (126), AGN.

wake of the Cuban Revolution, worries about subversion and agitation increasingly blended into and heightened Mexican leaders' greatest fear: that of armed rebellion.

GUERRILLAS IN THE MIST

In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, Lázaro Cárdenas and many others warned the nation's leaders that Mexico was not exempt from a revolution. Seemingly everyone—from American sociologists to leading Mexican communists to intelligence agents—declared that Mexico was ripe for rebellion. Their warnings had some basis in reality; guerrilla groups did, in fact, operate in parts of the country. On September 23, 1965, a group of rebels attacked a military barracks at Ciudad Madera in the state of Chihuahua. In addition, Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas led protracted guerrilla uprisings in the state of Guerrero. This final section of this chapter explores the perceived and actual threat of violent revolution and guerrilla warfare in 1960's Mexico.

Mexican audiences took note when, in 1960, U.S. sociologist C. Wright Mills published a landmark book titled *Listen, Yankee* about the Cuban Revolution. Prior to writing the book, Mills had spent three months in Mexico City and become close to leading left-wing writers including Carlos Fuentes.⁸⁹ A Mexican publishing house produced a Spanish translation of Mills's book shortly after the English edition appeared.⁹⁰ In *Listen, Yankee*, Mills authored a series of "letters" to U.S. leaders about the problems of imperialism, colonialism, and monopolistic ownership, adopting the

⁸⁹ Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

voices of protagonists of the Cuban Revolution.⁹¹ He warned that the same problems that led to Fidel's uprising in Cuba were to be found across Latin America. "What the Cubans are saying and doing today, other hungry peoples in Latin America are going to be saying and doing tomorrow," Mills declared.⁹² Mexico was no exception. "And Mexico?" Mills asked rhetorically, "Her great revolution of 1910 has stalled...[but] the wind that once swept Mexico may yet sweep it again. Despite everything, which today is quite a lot, Mexico is a windy place."⁹³

A violent confrontation between the army and the public in Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero, at the end of 1960 seemed to confirm Mills's warning. On December 30, eleven people died and forty were injured after an altercation between a soldier and an electrician escalated into a generalized shoot-out between the army and the public.⁹⁴ The unrest in the city had begun months earlier when multiple opposition groups started demanding the state governor's resignation. An electrician had been hanging a protest poster when a soldier ordered him to stop and then opened fire when he refused. A crowd of a thousand quickly gathered and advanced upon army troops, prompting them to shoot into the throng. By the end of the day, ten civilians and one soldier had died. Authorities arrested nearly one hundred people, the majority of them students, in connection with the incident.⁹⁵ They reportedly found weapons, Cuban propaganda, and one hundred and fifty

⁹¹ C. Wright Mills, *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁴ "Corre la sangre en Guerrero; 11 muertos, 40 heridos graves," *Novedades*, December 31, 1960.

⁹⁵ Armando Fischer S., "Otras 96 personas fueron apresados en Chilpancingo," *Novedades*, January 2, 1961.

Molotov cocktails stashed on university grounds. A writer for *Novedades* covering the widespread opposition to Governor Raúl Caballero Aburto reported that numerous cities across the state, including Acapulco, remained in the hands of the opposition movement. Governor Caballero Aburto blamed the unrest on communist agitation. The state's district attorney seconded the governor's claims, telling reporters that police had uncovered plans to subvert the public order.⁹⁶

This was one battle Caballero Aburto would not win. Another violent confrontation broke out in Iguala, Guerrero, between police and people who opposed the governor. Five agents suffered injuries and authorities arrested four protestors. The state's district attorney declared that the communists were "using Guerrero as a guinea pig to test the possibilities of success of their general plan to subvert the national order." He blamed the unrest on an "extremely dangerous international conspiracy," possibly inspired by the Cuban experience.⁹⁷ Apparently, the so-called communist test was a success; the national congress replaced Caballero Aburto with an interim governor on January 4, 1961.⁹⁸ The new governor ordered the release of all those arrested in connection with the anti-Aburtista movement. He declared that President López Mateos was "with the people of Guerrero."⁹⁹ The incidents in Guerrero demonstrated the president's willingness to make concessions to prevent violence.

⁹⁶ Armando Fischer S., "Renace la calma en Chilpancingo," *Novedades*, January 3, 1961.

⁹⁷ Armando Fischer S., "La situación en Guerrero," *Novedades*, January 4, 1961.

⁹⁸ Carlos Perez Patiño, "Cae Caballero Aburto; le releva Martínez Adame," *Novedades*, January 5, 1961.

⁹⁹ Armando Fischer S., "Cordial bienvenida al nuevo gobernador, cuyo primer acto fue ordenar la libertad de los presos," *Novedades* (Mexico City, January 5, 1961).

In December of 1961, the leftist magazine *Política* declared that the Mexican government faced a crossroads. The cover of the magazine proclaimed in bold red letters: “Complete Revolution, or Violence” (see Image 3.1). The magazine explained that Senator Manuel Moreno Sánchez had told reporters that it was necessary to intensify Mexico’s revolution in order to avoid the danger that hunger and poverty would drive the public to violence. “Intensifying the Revolution today can mean preventing violence tomorrow,” the senator declared.¹⁰⁰ The author of the *Política* article suspected that Moreno Sánchez had made the statement after discussing the matter with President López Mateos and gaining his approval. The senator put it clearly: the president was willing to take “revolutionary” measures—or at least appeared to be doing so—in order to counter the threat of violent unrest.

López Mateos’s revolutionary gestures had the intended effect. Thanks to the president’s combination of conceding to some movements, like the anti-Aburtistas in Guerrero, and repressing others, such as the Jaramillistas, the threat of violent opposition generally waned for most of the remainder of his time in office. As the 1964 elections approached, however, the specters of revolution and guerrilla warfare once again reared their ugly heads.

Over half a year before the big day, intelligence agents began to warn that leftist groups were preparing to use violent means to disrupt the elections. The head of the Department of Federal Security reported in September 1963 that leaders of the Independent Campesino Center and the People’s Electoral Front were purchasing weapons to distribute among peasants and railroad workers in Baja California. He also

¹⁰⁰ “El senador, en la línea,” *Política*, December 1, 1961.



Image 3.1: *Política*'s threatening cover, reading "Complete Revolution, or Violence."
Source: *Política*, December 1, 1961.

claimed that the FEP was forming shock brigades that would bring weapons to demonstrations in order to repel the grenadiers and secret police.¹⁰¹

A few months later, another DFS agent submitted an even more appalling report. He claimed that the National Liberation Movement, upon orders from Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, had called a secret meeting about forming a militia. Members of the Independent Campesino Center, the People's Electoral Front, the Popular Socialist Party, the Mexican Communist Party, and railroad workers who followed Demetrio Vallejo supposedly attended. These militias would be in charge of managing the opposition to Díaz Ordaz's presidential candidacy through sabotage and assassination. At the secret meeting, the leftist groups also reportedly agreed to accelerate the training of guerrilla troops, equipping them with weapons that were soon to arrive from Cuba.¹⁰²

As the elections approached, the warnings about violent opposition and guerrilla groups increased. The head of intelligence reported in February 1964 that leaders of the People's Electoral Front had been overheard bragging about how many followers they had ready to go to the mountains. One leader reportedly claimed that he had twenty-five thousand men in Chihuahua prepared to stage guerrilla warfare against the government. Another said that he planned to gather ten thousand men to take to the hills around Mexico City. They would operate there for about five to six weeks, "just like the guerrillas of Fidel Castro," in order to pressure the government to provide more support to campesinos and workers.¹⁰³ In May 1964, another DFS agent reported that members of

¹⁰¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP and CCI acquiring weapons]," September 9, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-141-63, Leg. 3, Hoja 93, AGN.

¹⁰² "[MLN militias]," December 4, 1963, DFS, Exp 11-6-63, Leg. 11, Hoja 180, AGN.

¹⁰³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[FEP members ready to fight]," February 27, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 7, Hoja 61, AGN.

the Independent Campesino Center in the state of Colima were receiving training in the methods of guerrilla warfare from a retired veteran of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁰⁴ Two days before the election, an agent of the Department of Political and Social Investigations claimed that there was a group of about fifty armed members of the People's Electoral Front in a town near Chilpancingo, Guerrero.¹⁰⁵

The worries of intelligence agents that guerrilla warfare would mar the elections proved to be unfounded and Díaz Ordaz won without mass outbreaks of violence. Even so, the protectors of national order did not let down their guard. Shortly after the elections, the head of the Department of Federal Security submitted a report about guerrillas in the mountains of Chihuahua. He claimed that “communist guerrillas” were planning an uprising for December and had already gone to the sierras to train. The intelligence agent's source, the secretary of the Independent Campesino Center, told him that the rebels had a copy of Che Guevara's guide to guerrilla warfare and were “studying it meticulously.” The source also claimed that eighty soldiers had been sent to the mountains to suffocate the rebellion. Their failure to return or send word of their progress suggested that they might have joined the uprising.¹⁰⁶ The story told in the intelligence report, true or not, contained numerous overtones of the Cuban Revolution, in which many Cuban soldiers' reluctance to defend Batista and defection to Castro's guerrilla forces paved the way for the revolutionaries' triumph.

¹⁰⁴ “[CCI guerrilla plans],” May 29, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-136-64, Leg. 6, Hoja 12, AGN.

¹⁰⁵ “[armed FEP members in Guerrero],” July 3, 1964, IPS Caja 444, Exp 2, AGN.

¹⁰⁶ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[communist guerrillas in Chihuahua],” August 28, 1964, DFS, Exp 100-17-3-2-64, Leg. 1, Hoja 47, AGN.

Nineteen sixty-five was a red-letter year for the guerrilla movement in Mexico. That summer, Mexican leaders received reports from their intelligence agents that communists were preparing for war. At the end of July, the Department of Federal Security noted that the Mexican Communist Party and other leftist groups had “a vast plan of agitation for the entire country,” which required “the organization of guerrilla groups of communist elements in various states of the Republic, using campesinos and students.” The communists intended to create a “Popular Revolutionary Army” to reinforce rebel groups already operating in Chihuahua.¹⁰⁷

The DFS reports referred to a guerrilla group in the state of Chihuahua headed by Arturo Gámiz, Pablo Gómez, and Salomón Gaytán. Gámiz and Gaytán were local leaders of the Popular Socialist Party’s General Union of Mexican Workers and Campesinos (Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos Mexicanos, or UGOCM) and members of the National Liberation Movement.¹⁰⁸ They formed their guerrilla group around the end of 1963. Gámiz, a rural schoolteacher, provided the ideological leadership. Gaytán, a campesino, acted as head of operations. Their group was the first in Mexico to base their actions on Che Guevara’s *Guide to Guerrilla Warfare*, confirming the director of intelligence’s warning.¹⁰⁹ In October 1963, the magazine *Política* published the full text of Che’s guide; the Chihuahua rebels might have read it there.¹¹⁰ The group eventually acquired another ideological leader: Pablo Gómez, a doctor, professor, and leader of the

¹⁰⁷ “[communist plans for agitation],” July 28, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-4-65, Leg. 15, Hoja 121, AGN.

¹⁰⁸ Castellanos, *México armado*, 73.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹¹⁰ Ernesto “Che” Guevara, “La guerra de guerrillas: Un método. Una interpretación de la Segunda Declaración de La Habana,” *Política*, October 1, 1963.

Popular Socialist Party and the UGOCM. After becoming disillusioned with legal political channels after the 1964 elections, Gómez went to Mexico City and applied for permission to move to Cuba. When the authorities denied his request, he returned to Chihuahua and joined the guerrillas at the beginning of 1965.¹¹¹

On September 23, 1965, the Chihuahua guerrillas made their mark on Mexican history. A few minutes before dawn, thirteen students, teachers, and campesinos of the Popular Guerrilla Group began their attack on the army barracks at Ciudad Madera. They planned to stage a lightning assault, seize weapons and money, and transmit a revolutionary message over the local radio before returning to the mountains, as Guevara's manual advised.¹¹² Just like Castro's ill-fated attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953, the Chihuahua group's plan failed. One hundred and twenty five soldiers guarded the barracks and repelled the assault for an hour and a half. Five of the guerrillas managed to flee. Eight others died, including leaders Gómez, Gámiz, and Gaytán. Soldiers displayed the bodies of the fallen guerrillas in a row, the better for photographing and public viewing, then buried them in a common grave. "Since it was dirt that they were fighting for," the state governor quipped, "give them dirt until they are full of it."¹¹³

Just like the Cuban army's triumph at the Moncada barracks, the Mexican army's defeat of the Chihuahua guerrillas proved to be a pyrrhic victory. Guerrilla movements in Chihuahua and elsewhere across the country blossomed. The events inspired half a dozen

¹¹¹ Castellanos, *México armado*, 77.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 63.

¹¹³ "Sangre en Chihuahua," *Política*, October 1, 1965. The governor's comment played upon the double meaning of the Spanish word "tierra," which can be translated as both "land" and "dirt."

armed groups just within the state, and eight years later the most important urban guerrilla group in Mexico, the Communist League of the 23 of September, commemorated the date of the attack.¹¹⁴ Police arrested two survivors of the attack on the barracks at Ciudad Madera half a year later for participation in further guerrilla activities as part of a communist plot.¹¹⁵ Journalist Víctor Rico Galán published a widely read account of the assault. He called it an act of suicidal desperation justified by years of abuse, concluding that peaceful change was impossible in Mexico.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, a team of U.S. and Mexican intelligence agents intensified their surveillance of the journalist. Police arrested Rico Galán and twenty-eight associates a year later, accusing them of fomenting revolution. The journalist remained in jail for seven years.¹¹⁷ The Mexican government clearly considered the barracks assault a serious issue.

Intelligence reports about communists training for revolution proliferated in the years following the events in Chihuahua. Agents of the Department of Federal Security, Department of Political and Social Investigations, and Federal Police independently claimed on numerous occasions that the Mexican Communist Party was instructing its members in the methods of guerrilla warfare.¹¹⁸ IPS agents composed a report about the

¹¹⁴ Castellanos, *México armado*, 64.

¹¹⁵ “Conjura roja en Chihuahua delatada por un cabecilla,” *El Universal*, March 10, 1966.

¹¹⁶ Castellanos, *México armado*, 81.

¹¹⁷ Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 261.

¹¹⁸ Policia Judicial Federal, “[communist guerrilla training],” June 2, 1966, GDO 205 (124), AGN; “[PCM providing guerrilla training],” August 6, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-4-66, Leg. 18, Hoja 21, AGN; “Actividades del Partido Comunista Mexicano,” 1966, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[PCM comite clandestino and guerrilla activity],” June 28, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-136-67, Leg. 17, Hoja 123, AGN; “[PCM guerrilla warfare preparations],” April 18, 1964, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN; “[communist activities],” July 9, 1967, IPS Caja 2966 C, AGN; “[PCM’s guerrilla plans],” July 13, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-4-67, Leg. 20, Hoja 271, AGN.

guerrilla problem in the state of Guerrero that included a list of thirty-six armed cells, each containing anywhere from eight to fifty members.¹¹⁹ The head of the DFS sent to the federal prosecutor's office the text of speech made by the leader of the Mexican Communist Party, Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo. The intelligence director transcribed the entire speech, underlining the most incriminating sections where Martínez Verdugo had proclaimed that Mexico required a "new revolution" consisting of armed struggle.¹²⁰ Agents of the federal prosecutor's office acted upon the DFS's report by interrogating the communist leader about his promotion of revolution and armed warfare.¹²¹

To a certain extent, the government's agents had cause to worry: there were, in fact, guerrilla groups operating within Mexico. In 1959, students, workers, campesinos, and professionals in the state of Guerrero formed a civic association to promote numerous social, economic, and political causes. A teacher named Genaro Vázquez Rojas became the president of the group and led the organization in its successful opposition to Governor Caballero Aburto. Vázquez had a history of political activism: he had been fired from one of his early teaching posts for participating in Othón Salazar's Revolutionary Teachers' Movement and had also joined the National Liberation Movement.¹²² In December 1962, his civic association participated in state and local elections but failed to win any posts. The group organized a mass protest in the main plaza of Iguala to denounce the electoral fraud and violent repression. Police and soldiers

¹¹⁹ "Estado de Guerrero," 1968, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN.

¹²⁰ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[PCM leader's remarks]," July 3, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-4-67, Leg. 20, Hoja 285, AGN.

¹²¹ "[Interrogation of Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo]," July 11, 1967, IPS Caja 1456 A, AGN.

¹²² Castellanos, *México armado*, 112, 70.

attended the protest and tried to arrest Vázquez. He escaped, but a gunfight erupted in which seven or eight civilians and one police officer died. Blamed for the death of the policeman, Vázquez had to flee the state until Lázaro Cárdenas interceded with authorities on his behalf.¹²³

State violence against the residents of Guerrero continued. In 1966, police arrested Vázquez outside the offices of the National Liberation Movement in Mexico City, and a court sentenced him to fourteen years of prison. He remained in prison for two years, where he became further radicalized, until his followers arranged his escape in May 1968. Vázquez took to the hills, and his civic association became a guerrilla group.

Another even more important guerrilla group operated simultaneously in Guerrero. Lucio Cabañas, a teacher of campesino origins like Vázquez, led a group called the Party of the Poor. A member of the Mexican Communist Party and the National Liberation Movement, Cabañas initially resisted violent opposition to the government.¹²⁴ When a group of followers of Arturo Gámiz arrived from Chihuahua in 1966 to ask Cabañas to help them spread their Movement of the 23 of September to Guerrero, he declined.¹²⁵

In 1967 another massacre, this time of five teachers and parents outside a school in Atoyac, Guerrero, drove Cabañas to resort to armed rebellion. Authorities blamed him for the violent confrontation, and he went into hiding.¹²⁶ Cabañas and Vázquez pursued their separate armed struggles for a number of years, despite the government's efforts to

¹²³ Ibid., 114.

¹²⁴ Mayo, *La guerrilla de Genaro y Lucio*, 45.

¹²⁵ Castellanos, *México armado*, 116-117.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 116; Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, 233.

eliminate them. They proselytized among the public, kidnapped important local and national figures, and assaulted political and military targets. According to one chronicler of the guerrilla movements, the military sent fourteen expeditions to Guerrero beginning in 1968 and devoted one third of its men to pursuit of the guerrillas.¹²⁷ Vázquez died in an automobile accident in 1972. Cabañas held out until the end of 1974, when he was killed in combat.¹²⁸ Both opposition leaders, driven to violence by state repression, created a great deal of trouble for the Díaz Ordaz administration.

Mexican authorities took the threat of guerrilla warfare and a new revolution very seriously. Intelligence agents maintained a close watch for armed opposition to the government and they found it. Even if López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz doubted the veracity of some of the intelligence reports, there was no denying the violent unrest in Chihuahua and Guerrero. In some cases, Mexican leaders appeared willing to grant concessions to the public's demands, but in others they answered opposition movements with violent repression.

CONCLUSION

In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, even the most stable, powerful governments had to take stock. Castro's success seemingly demonstrated that a small group of committed men and women was enough to topple an entire regime. Che Guevara's guide to guerrilla warfare provided a blueprint for revolution, inaccurate to be

¹²⁷ Mayo, *La guerrilla de Genaro y Lucio*, 84.

¹²⁸ On the guerrilla movement in Guerrero, see Avina, Alexander, "Insurgent Guerrero: Genaro Vázquez, Lucio Cabañas and the Guerrilla Challenge to the Postrevolutionary Mexican State, 1960-1996" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009); José Arturo Gallegos Nájera, *La guerrilla en Guerrero: testimonios sobre el Partido de los Pobres y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (Chilpancingo: Grupo Editorial Lama, 2004).

sure, but still highly convincing. Mexico's leaders would have been foolish to ignore the Cuban example, and fools they were not.

The 1960s were also the height of the Cold War. By this time, Mexican security forces, especially the Department of Federal Security, had become partners in the United States' anti-communist crusade. From Washington, the message emanated that the greatest threat to national security was that of internal subversion. Judging by their reports and actions, Mexican security forces accepted this vision of their mission. Their biggest concern was to root out communists. They found, invented, or imagined evidence of the communist threat everywhere, and passed that information along to the minister of the interior and the president. News in the press corroborated their claims that communists and other leftists were trying to topple the government through insidious and violent means.

The threat of internal subversion and revolution left Mexican leaders with a difficult decision with regard to Cuba. A large part of the United States' campaign to isolate Cuba was predicated upon the belief that Castro was supporting subversive groups in other countries. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz received information from their agents that Cubans in Mexico were involved in leftist oppositional activities. However, they also knew that, more than material aid, the Cubans provided inspiration. Mexican leaders decided to harness leftist and communist enthusiasm for Castro and use their nation's foreign policy to gain leverage with oppositional groups.

Mexico's diplomatic ties with Cuba made the Mexican government appear more "revolutionary," and López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz hoped that revolutionary appearances would be enough to keep violent domestic opposition from spreading. To some degree, the decision to maintain relations with Cuba was part of a successful strategy: no guerrilla or communist group ever managed to topple the Mexican government. But, as the next

chapter on the 1968 student movement will show, Mexican leaders at times tragically misunderstood so-called subversive activities.

Chapter Four: Cuba and the Mexican Student Movement

*“We will do what we have to.”
President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz
State of the Union Address
September 1, 1968*

On the afternoon of October 2, 1968, between five and fifteen thousand people gathered in Mexico City’s Plaza de Tlatelolco. Most were students, assembled there to plan the next step in their two-month-long protest against the Mexican government and police. They filled the plaza, which was surrounded by apartment buildings, a colonial church, and the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Relations. Army personnel, by then a common accompaniment to student demonstrations, also ringed the area. Leaders of the National Strike Council (Consejo Nacional de Huelga) addressed the crowd from the fourth-floor balcony of one of the apartment buildings.

Unbeknownst to the students and the soldiers, a top-secret group of ten officials armed with submachine guns were hiding in the buildings surrounding the plaza. Other government agents with white gloves on one hand immersed themselves in the crowd. Shortly after six, a helicopter circled the plaza and dropped a couple of flares. That was the signal. The gunners in the buildings opened fire on the students and army men below. The soldiers and the agents in the white gloves answered fire, shooting indiscriminately. The students found themselves trapped in a bloodbath that lasted hours, well into the night. By the time the shooting had stopped, at least forty people lay dead and hundreds more were wounded. The events of October 2, 1968, have subsequently become known as the Tlatelolco Massacre.¹

¹ On the secret group of ten officials posted in the buildings, see Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis, *Parte de guerra: Tlatelolco 1968, Documentos del General Marcelino García Barragán*. Los

The student movement of 1968 and its climax, the Tlatelolco Massacre, became a watershed moment in Mexican history. The biggest, most disruptive protest movement in decades, it exploded immediately before the eyes of the world would turn to Mexico for the Olympic Games. Many historians, political scientists, and other observers consider it the beginning of the end for the PRI and the governmental system that it represented.² Both the movement itself and the government's brutal response called into question the legitimacy and so-called democratic nature of the regime.

The 1968 Mexican student movement occurred within both a national and international context. Within Mexico, student activism had been on the rise for over a decade. Authorities' reactions had also become increasingly violent over the years. Internationally, the decade of the 1960s and especially the year 1968 witnessed a rash of student activism. In communist China, Mao Zedong called for a "cultural revolution" to be led by the younger generation against the established sources of authority. Racial and economic riots rocked cities across the United States, spawning a radical Black Power movement. Parisian students fought police for control of the Sorbonne through a haze of tear gas. A quarter of a million Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to the

hechos y la historia (Mexico City: Aguilar, 1999), 42; Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 269. On the agents in white gloves, see Donald J. Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State: Student Conflicts, 1910-1971* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 264. On the controversial issue of the number of deaths, see "Los muertos de Tlatelolco," National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB201/muertos.htm>; Kate Doyle, "The Dead of Tlatelolco: Using the Archives to Exhume the Past," *The National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book* 201 (October 1, 2006), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB201/index.htm>.

² Dolores Trevizo, *Rural Protest and the Making of Democracy in Mexico, 1968-2000* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Francisco Pérez Arce, *El principio: 1968-1998, años de rebeldía* (Mexico City: Ítaca, 2007); Gerardo Estrada Rodríguez, *1968, estado y universidad: Orígenes de la transición política en México* (Mexico City: Plaza Janés, 2004); Julia Preston, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

Prague Spring. Students in Brazil and Argentina rose up against dictatorial rulers. Witnesses proclaimed 1968 a year of global revolutions.³

Historians and other scholars have written many analyses of the Mexican student movement. Recently, Jaime Pensado has produced a dissertation about the escalation of student violence in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Elaine Carey has contributed a gendered approach to the historiography of the 1968 movement, arguing that it challenged a traditional set of discourses about the roles of women and young people in Mexican society.⁵ Eric Zolov has also examined the student movement as a “crisis of patriarchal values” in his history of rock music and the counter-cultural revolts in Mexico.⁶ In addition, quite a few of the participants in the movement—students, teachers, and government officials—have published accounts of the events.⁷

³ On the international events of 1968, see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine, 2004); David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁴ Jaime Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico: The Consolidation of *Porrisimo* During the 1950s and 1960s” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008). Pensado defines *porrisimo* as a practice involving five strategies: “(1) the financing of student violence, provocation, and fun inside the schools via intermediaries (including *porristas* or cheerleaders and *porros* of 'thugs' for hire); (2) the manipulation and coopting of influential student leaders by intermediaries via physical intimidation and/or bribes; (3) the distribution of apocryphal propaganda in the schools and in the press by agent provocateurs in order to mislead the public concerning the demands of the student activists; (4) the creation of pseudostudent organizations (with the collaboration of unscrupulous school authorities) usually disguised as 'leftist' and/or 'cultural' student organizations; and (5) the installation of corrupt student leaders with close ties to the governing elite inside student organizations.” (pages 1-2). Pensado has also written a very useful article on the state of the literature on the student movement. Jaime Pensado, “The (forgotten) Sixties in Mexico,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1, no. 1 (June 2008): 83-90.

⁵ Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

⁶ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

⁷ Raúl Jardón, *1968: El fuego de la esperanza* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1998); Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *1968: Largo camino a la democracia* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2008); Antonio Jáquez, “En el 68, Echeverría aisló, desinformó y le calentó la cabeza a Díaz Ordaz: Farías,” *Proceso*, October 11,

But questions about the student movement—and the government’s reaction—remain. What role, if any, did Cubans play in the Mexican student movement of the 1960s? And more importantly, why did Mexican leaders *believe* that Cubans were involved? Answering these questions provides new insight into both the Mexican government’s reaction to the student movement and Mexico’s foreign relations with Cuba. This chapter is the first historical analysis of the Mexican student movement of the 1960s to examine it in the context of Mexico’s foreign relations with Cuba. It argues that despite suspicions of Cuban involvement with student agitation, Mexican leaders decided to maintain relations with the island in an attempt to capitalize upon the younger generation’s enthusiasm for Castro and Che. In a period when the government that claimed to institutionalize the Mexican Revolution was behaving in a decidedly conservative manner, maintaining a rhetorical and diplomatic link to the new generation of revolutionary leaders in Cuba helped shore up the regime’s image, especially among restive students.

The chapter begins with a short history of the national context of the student movement of 1968 to show that rather than a spontaneous outburst of anger, the events of 1968 were actually the climax of years of escalating agitation and confrontation. The next section examines one of the most important student organizations of the 1960s, the National Center of Democratic Students (Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos, or CNED). This analysis uses newly-available intelligence records to provide insight into the government’s perception of student agitation. Finally, the chapter explores Mexican leaders’ perceptions of Cuban involvement in the student movement, including the events

1993; Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle: Crónica del movimiento estudiantil mexicano*, (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1988); Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, *Díaz Ordaz: el hombre, el gobernante* (Mexico City: Gustavo de Anda, 1988); Heberto Castillo, “Los represores del 68,” *Proceso*, September 13, 1993.

of 1968. It argues that while some politicians used the “communist threat” as a pretext to repress activism, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz genuinely believed that Castro’s agents were providing encouragement, propaganda, and money to Mexican students as part of an international communist conspiracy against Mexico.

THE GROWTH OF STUDENT ACTIVISM

Student movements have appeared in Mexico with some regularity since the end of the Revolution.⁸ Activists at the national university staged a general strike in 1929, gaining autonomy for their institution.⁹ During the 1930s, some students fought against Lázaro Cárdenas’s socialist reforms to the educational system while others defended the changes.¹⁰ Internal struggles for control of student organizations divided the universities throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Activism intensified and radicalized in the 1950s and 1960s, beginning with a strike in 1956 at the National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional, or IPN).¹¹ The politicization of student activism increased with the bus strikes of 1958 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and continued throughout the 1960s.

⁸ On the history of student activism in twentieth-century Mexico, see Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*; Salvador Martínez Della Rocca, *Estado y universidad en México, 1920-1968: Historia de los movimientos estudiantiles en la UNAM* (Mexico City: J. Boldó i Climent, 1986); Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*; Jardón, 1968; Sergio Aguayo, 1968: *Los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998). Zolov, *Refried Elvis*.

⁹ See Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*; Donald J. Mabry, *The 1929 UNAM General Strike* (Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee, Center for Latin America, 1980).

¹⁰ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 15. On President Cárdenas’s educational policy, see Mary K. Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

¹¹ On the radicalization of student activism in the 1950s, see Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico.”

In 1956, the government faced its first significant threat in decades from students. The strike began in April, when all twenty-five thousand students of the National Polytechnic Institute walked out, demanding educational reforms including increased student participation in the governance of the IPN and the removal of the rector and six other administrators.¹² Students of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM) declined to join the strike, but it quickly spread to other institutions, especially teacher-training colleges (normales) and agricultural schools. Before long, it had drawn in more than one hundred thousand participants.¹³

One aspect of this strike set it apart from earlier activism: a heavy emphasis on direct action and confrontation. Peaceful tactics aimed to reach out to fellow students and other sectors of society across the country through informational brigades and public rallies. But more violent ones included hijacking buses and taking physical possession of buildings. Some of the students formed shock brigades to defend their “liberated territories.”¹⁴ Articles in the U.S. press described rioting and other violent scenes in which groups of strikers roamed the streets of Mexico City stoning buses and beating drivers and passengers.¹⁵

Government leaders took a number of measures to quell the protests in the National Polytechnic Institute. They orchestrated a press campaign to portray the strike as communist-inspired in order to curtail public sympathy for the students. President Adolfo

¹² For a detailed analysis of the 1956 strike in the IPN, see *Ibid.*, 141-200.

¹³ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 16.

¹⁴ Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico,” 153.

¹⁵ “Striking Students Riot in Mexico City,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1956.

Ruiz Cortines tried to negotiate a settlement, offering the students a greater role in policymaking at their institution but refusing to fire any administrators. Agitation continued, however, and Ruiz Cortines responded to demands for a new rector by hiring an even more authoritarian figure than the last. The head of the police department instructed his men to arrest all “subversive” students.¹⁶ After six months of strikes and protests, the situation became so desperate that on September 23, 1956, President Ruiz Cortines called in the federal army to occupy the Polytechnic Institute.¹⁷ Nearly two thousand soldiers and four hundred police officers invaded the campus, with orders to arrest all troublemakers.¹⁸ Authorities detained more than three hundred students and sent the leaders of the strike to prison for over two years. In addition, the army continued to occupy the Polytechnic Institute until the end of 1958.

Patterns for protest and response established during the 1956 strike at the National Polytechnic Institute continued throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s. Activist students across the country used many of the tactics of direct action—both peaceful and violent—that the *politécnicos* had pioneered in order to pursue a variety of goals. Some protesters sought purely educational reforms like the removal of specific administrators; others had wider political agendas such as the abolition of the riot police. As in 1956, government officials continued to answer with a combination of concession and repression.

¹⁶ “Se ordena a la policía detener a los estudiantes depredadores,” *Excélsior*, August 22, 1956.

¹⁷ One of the leaders of the assault on the Ciudad Madera barracks in 1965, Arturo Gámiz, was also a leader of the 1956 student movement in the IPN. He and his followers chose September 23 as the date for their assault in Chihuahua to commemorate the army’s occupation of the National Polytechnic Institute. See Chapter Three of this dissertation and Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 30.

¹⁸ Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico,” 176.

It was not long before the level of violence in university activism increased. Outraged by a hike in bus fares and inspired by labor unrest, hundreds of students from the National University began a raucous, destructive protest known as the “bus movement” in August 1958.¹⁹ They seized hundreds of vehicles, set fire to two terminals after violent confrontations with bus drivers, and painted slogans such as “death to bad government” on the walls of the National Palace.²⁰ The students also seized control of the UNAM campus, where they stashed the buses that they had commandeered. Soldiers surrounded the university, and police tried to recover the stolen vehicles, arresting various students in the process. A group of drivers armed with “sticks and stones” invaded the campus and recovered ten buses, leaving broken windows and disorder in their wake.²¹ One student became injured in a confrontation with a driver.²²

What set this protest apart, in addition to its destructive nature, was its dedication to a cause outside the educational realm and its attempt to connect with the working class. Those involved in the bus movement demanded an end to the private monopoly of city buses, improvement of the transportation system without increasing fares, and the immediate release of the arrested students. They also defended bus drivers’ rights to better working conditions and independent labor unions. The strikers organized a march

¹⁹ On the bus movement, see Jardón, *1968*; Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*; Estrada Rodríguez, *1968, estado y universidad*; René Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM: Organizaciones, movilizaciones y liderazgos (1958-1972)* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Estudios Superiores Aragón, 2007). On the labor unrest in 1958, see also Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

²⁰ Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico,” 202.

²¹ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas and Fiscalía Especial FEMOSPP, *Informe histórico presentado a la sociedad mexicana: Genocidio y delitos de la humanidad, documentos fundamentales, 1968-2008* (Mexico City: Comité 68 Pro Libertades Democráticas, 2008), 59.

²² Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM*, 134.

to the Zócalo that observers estimated brought together somewhere between thirty and two hundred thousand participants. These included students from the National University, the Polytechnic Institute, and teacher training colleges. Teachers attended, as did railroad, petroleum, telegraph, and bus workers.²³ For the first time in Mexico's history, students from UNAM, IPN, and the Advanced Teaching College (Escuela Normal Superior) had formed an alliance.²⁴ Shortly after the march, President Ruiz Cortines met with the leaders and announced his compliance with some of their demands: fares would return to their original levels and all those arrested in connection with the events would be released from jail. The students returned the buses and the protest ended.

The protests of 1956 and 1958 marked major turning points in the history of student activism in twentieth-century Mexico. The lengthy revolt at the Polytechnic Institute introduced novel organizational and confrontational tactics. Students formed new groups outside their traditional associations and developed strategies of outreach and protest. The short-lived "bus movement" of 1958 united students from three of Mexico's most important educational institutions for the first time and marked the beginning of an era of independent activism at UNAM. In both cases, leftist students led the charge.

Adolfo López Mateos entered office a few months after the bus strikes and began his presidency on a conciliatory note. In response to student petitions, he pardoned the leader of the 1956 strike at the National Polytechnic Institute and removed the army from the IPN's campus. Perhaps he felt affinity with the students, as he himself had participated in oppositional politics in his youth. In 1929, López Mateos had been an

²³ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 22; Jardón, *1968*, 15; Pensado, "Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico;" 258-259.

²⁴ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 211.

enthusiastic member of the Student Directorate of José Vasconcelos's presidential campaign against the official candidate and temporarily had to flee the country as a result.²⁵ It is possible that he hoped that the student strikers of 1956 would follow his example, accept their defeat, and join the official fold.

Students, especially those with leftist leanings, became increasingly politicized and vocal during López Mateos's presidency. Activism was on the rise but for the most part remained relatively peaceful, especially in the nation's capital.²⁶ New organizations proliferated on the UNAM campus. Students participated in events like the Latin American Peace Conference and joined the National Liberation Movement (MLN) and the People's Electoral Front (FEP). One of the few times when masses of students turned violent was during the Bay of Pigs invasion, and on that occasion their anger was directed outside the country at the United States.²⁷ Though numerous smaller revolts occurred, there were no repeats of the major strikes of 1956 and 1958.

Intelligence agents' records reveal that they maintained a close watch on the universities and kept their supervisors abreast of any potential developments. In 1962, the head of the Department of Federal Security compiled a detailed, seventeen-page report about the situation in UNAM. Among his conclusions, he warned that the majority of the faculty in the School of Economics was "affiliated with the communists and promoted a plan of studies designed to attack the capitalist social system."²⁸ On other occasions, he

²⁵ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 629.

²⁶ Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM*, 348-349.

²⁷ On Mexican students' reaction to the Bay of Pigs invasion, see Chapter One of this dissertation, as well as Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Cárdenas and students protest Bay of Pigs]," April 18, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 168, AGN; "El país, con Cuba," *Política*, May 1, 1961.

²⁸ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Algunos aspectos de la situación que prevalece en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México," February 21, 1962, DFS, Exp 63-1-62, Leg. 16, Hoja 189, AGN.

described cooperation between student leaders and ex-President Lázaro Cárdenas as well as between students and the National Liberation Movement.²⁹

The head of intelligence additionally claimed that the MLN controlled an organization called the Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico. “The students of the thirty rural teacher training colleges in the republic are affiliated with the People’s Electoral Front, controlled by the National Liberation Movement, and disposed to cling on to any pretext to agitate,” he warned.³⁰ In a later report, the head of intelligence elaborated on the methods and purposes of control, claiming that the leaders of the Federation of Socialist Campesino Students received money from the MLN in exchange for urging their followers to vote for the FEP’s presidential candidate.³¹

Other people expressed concern about students’ connections to “dangerous” opposition groups. In 1962, a professor of classic languages, Dr. Alberto Pulido Silva, published an article in the magazine *Jueves de Excelsior* about a “Red Conspiracy” in the universities. “I publicly denounce,” he wrote, “upon having obtained a secret document of the Communist Party, the existence of a conspiracy in all of the centers of study across the country.” He implicated Lázaro Cárdenas, the National Liberation Movement, the Mexican Communist Party, and the Popular Socialist Party in the vast plot.³² The same

²⁹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[Cárdenas’s connections with student leaders],” August 15, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 219, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN links with student leaders],” September 11, 1962, DFS, Exp 63-1-62, Leg. 18, Hoja 235, AGN.

³⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN controls the FECSM],” September 19, 1963, DFS, Exp 63-19-63, Leg. 1, Hoja 198, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN and FEP control the FECSM],” February 27, 1964, DFS, Exp 63-19-64, Leg. 1, Hoja 280, AGN.

³¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN pays FECSM leaders],” March 3, 1964, DFS, Exp 63-19-64, Leg. 1, Hoja 283, AGN.

³² Dr. Alberto Pulido Silva, “Conjura roja en la universidad,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, July 19, 1962.

month, an army general in Baja California sent a report to the Secretary of National Defense claiming that the MLN was distributing guerrilla manuals to students in a deliberate effort to incite an armed movement against the government.³³

Student activism caused problems even in the most conservative Mexican states. In Puebla, police intervention in a protest against the Bay of Pigs invasion sparked rioting and a university reform movement.³⁴ The students split into two factions that expanded outward beyond the university, sharply polarizing local society. The Central Intelligence Agency claimed that a pro-Castro group was behind the agitation and had issued a manifesto proclaiming “the Socialist Republic of Puebla.” The manifesto also supposedly announced that the student movement was the first step toward the establishment of a Castro-esque “26th of July Movement” in Mexico.³⁵ The army eventually occupied the city of Puebla to put an end to the conflict.³⁶

Military intervention could impose order only so long. Three years later, student agitators in Puebla again made national headlines when they helped organize protests against a new milk pasteurization law.³⁷ Like the bus protests of 1958 in the federal district, on this occasion students joined with other sectors of the population to agitate for goals unrelated to education. Intelligence agents reported that they followed the direct

³³ General de Division Comandante Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, “Actividades del MLN en Baja California,” July 1962, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 27, AGN.

³⁴ “La nación: Y detrás de Puebla...?,” *Política*, May 15, 1961.

³⁵ CIA, “Mexico,” June 2, 1961, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

³⁶ Will Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937-1987* (Amsterdam: Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, 1990), 97-124.

³⁷ On the pasteurization protests, see Chapter Two of this dissertation and “Puebla: Sangre y cárcel,” *Política*, October 15, 1964.

orders of “rabid communists.”³⁸ Violent clashes between the protestors and police lasted for days, and popular support for the students and the milk producers mounted. The federal army stepped in once more to restore order, and the state governor resigned.³⁹

Mexico’s universities saw an increase in oppositional political activity during the 1964 presidential elections. For months preceding the elections, intelligence officials submitted reports warning that leftist groups were organizing student agitation in opposition to Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and in favor of the FEP’s candidate. One agent claimed that the National Liberation Movement, in agreement with the People’s Electoral Front, planned to stir up disturbances using the cells that they had embedded among the teachers and students of the National Polytechnic Institute and teacher training colleges.⁴⁰ Another official wrote that the leaders of the student sector of the FEP had sent a group of subversives to Cuernavaca, Morelos, as part of a communist plot to create agitation and disrupt Díaz Ordaz’s presidential campaign tour. He also reported that federal police had arrested students in Puebla for organizing similar activities.⁴¹

The student agitation that Díaz Ordaz witnessed on the campaign trail only increased once he assumed the presidential seat. Five days after he entered office, a so-called “doctors’ movement” among young medical residents and interns broke out that disrupted medical services in the nation’s capital for nearly a year.⁴² The Executive

³⁸ “Universidad Autónoma de Puebla,” June 8, 1964, IPS Caja 444, Exp 1, AGN.

³⁹ “Puebla: Victoria del pueblo,” *Política*, November 1, 1964.

⁴⁰ Blas Garcia Hernández, “[MLN and FEP organizing student agitation],” February 4, 1964, DFS, Exp 40-1-64, Leg. 37, Hoja 182, AGN.

⁴¹ “[FEP agitation],” June 4, 1964, IPS Caja 444, Exp 1, AGN.

⁴² On the doctors’ movement, see Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, as well as Evelyn Stevens, *Protest and Response in Mexico* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974).

Committee of the Society of Students of the Faculty of Medicine, which represented the eight thousand medical students of UNAM, declared its support for the striking doctors.⁴³ Throughout the duration of the protests, medical and dentistry students at the National University, the National Polytechnic Institute, and across the country held assemblies and rallies and formed propaganda brigades. They organized protest marches through the streets of the capital and stood for hours outside the National Palace.⁴⁴ For the first time, students in the mostly apolitical field of medicine participated in large-scale activism. By the time Díaz Ordaz put an end to the doctors' movement by calling in the riot police (*granaderos*) and arresting and firing some of the doctors, the medical students had already gotten a taste of political activism. The president, meanwhile, had confirmed his belief that force was the most effective way to end protests.

Coinciding with the doctors' movement, ten thousand students from the majority of the nation's rural teacher training schools held a relatively successful month-long strike in April 1965.⁴⁵ They demanded more scholarship money for food, better laboratory equipment and library books, and improved transportation. The students held demonstrations and public meetings across the country, galvanizing thousands of people in Puebla, Zacatecas, and Cuernavaca. The organization behind the strikes, the Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico, was the same one that the former director of intelligence in the Department of Federal Security had warned his supervisor, Díaz Ordaz, about in 1963 and 1964. Eventually the government granted the students'

⁴³ Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM*, 437.

⁴⁴ "Fin del Conflicto Médico?," *Política*, June 1, 1965.

⁴⁵ "Huelga en las Normales," *Política*, May 1, 1965.

demands, and classes resumed in the rural teaching colleges. In this case, Díaz Ordaz agreed to grant the students' limited demands.

A massive strike at UNAM in 1966 caused Díaz Ordaz more trouble. In March of 1966, a group of conservative law students initiated a series of protests that spread across the campus and the country and eventually resulted in the resignation of the university's rector, Dr. Ignacio Chávez. The rector was a leftist and had presided over a number of controversial reforms at the university during his five years at the helm, both of which earned him enemies in the traditionally conservative Faculty of Law. Students across the university and the political spectrum also opposed his authoritarian style of administration.

The UNAM strike of 1966 had significant repercussions. After Chávez resigned, leftist students seized control of the movement and demanded reforms to the system. They managed to put an end to some of the more authoritarian and repressive elements of his administration including the "vigilance corps" of university police that Chávez had previously used to prevent student activism. In addition, the new rector, Javier Barros Sierra, would come to play a pivotal role in the student movement of 1968.

In his state of the union address of 1966, President Díaz Ordaz gave the nation's students a clear warning. "Our universities are autonomous so that the students may be free within a country that is also free and sovereign. But liberty is responsibility, not wild abandon; liberty within the law, not against the law," he lectured. But that was not the end of it. "Adolescence is not an escape from reality nor does it grant immunity from the law... neither claims of social and intellectual rank, nor economic position, nor age, nor

profession nor occupation grant anyone immunity. I must repeat: No one has rights against Mexico!”⁴⁶ Soon, the president would demonstrate the sincerity of his warning.

A month after Díaz Ordaz’s speech, the students of Michoacán tested his resolve. The University of Michoacán of San Nicolás de Hidalgo, originally called the Colegio of San Nicolás, was the oldest institution of higher education in the Americas and throughout its long history had developed a reputation for political activism. Students there embraced the spirit of the Cuban Revolution and had sacked the Mexican-North American Cultural Institute in 1961 to protest the Bay of Pigs invasion.⁴⁷ In 1963, the university hosted a meeting of over one hundred thousand students who formed a new leftist organization called the National Center of Democratic Students. In 1965, the head of the Department of Federal Security reported that the rector of the University of Michoacán, Alberto Bremauntz, was trying to stir up agitation against the federal and state governments.⁴⁸ An agent of the Federal Police described the rector as an “addict of Castro-communism” and claimed that he was trying to spread that philosophy throughout the university.⁴⁹

Rector Bremauntz validated the intelligence agents’ claims about his political loyalties when he published a book at the beginning of 1966 praising the Cuban

⁴⁶ “El Lic. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, al abrir el Congreso sus sesiones ordinarias, el 1o de septiembre de 1966,” in *Los Presidentes de México ante la Nación*, vol. 4 (Mexico City: Cámara de Diputados, 1966).

⁴⁷ Eric Zolov, “‘Cuba sí, yanquis no!’: El saqueo del Instituto Cultural México-Norteamericano en Morelia, Michoacán, 1961,” in *Espejos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe*, ed. Daniela Spenser (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2004), 175-214.

⁴⁸ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[student agitation in Michoacán],” March 26, 1965, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 3, Hoja 180, AGN.

⁴⁹ Policía Judicial Federal and Agente #450, “[communist activities in Morelia],” September 29, 1965, GDO 204 (123), AGN.

government. In *Mexico and the Socialist Revolution of Cuba*, Bremauntz lavished praise upon Cuba's leaders and their socialist educational reforms. "Castro is for me the most prominent figure in the Americas," he wrote, describing the Cuban leader as "a valiant, dynamic, and experienced politician who has known how to resolve the great problems that on all fronts have affected his people."⁵⁰ Bremauntz's publication also contained the text of a speech that he had delivered in Havana when he visited in 1964 for the Week of Mexico celebrations. He had concluded his remarks with a pledge to the Cubans: "Whenever any sacrifice may be necessary, any contribution or aid of any Mexican [from the University of Michoacán of San Nicolas], there are some, including myself, ready to collaborate with you in any way necessary in defense of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba."⁵¹ Intelligence agents would remember Bremauntz's enthusiasm for socialist revolution when problems arose at his university shortly thereafter.

Concerns about communism influenced security officers' and other officials' interpretations of student activism in Michoacán in 1966. On October 2, 1966, the students of the University of Michoacán organized a public rally to protest an increase in bus fares, and police officers killed one of the participants.⁵² That night, the new rector (who had replaced Bremauntz after his retirement), the faculty, and the students of the university went on strike, demanding punishment for those responsible and the removal of the state governor. Student organizations across the country declared their solidarity.

⁵⁰ Alberto Bremauntz, *México y la revolución socialista cubana* (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, 1966), 28-29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵² "Michoacán se Oganiza," *Política*, October 1, 1966.

Agents from the Federal Police believed that the strike was the result of a nationwide conspiracy. They claimed that students from UNAM and members of the Independent Campesino Center (CCI) and the Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico were involved in the strike.⁵³ They also reported that members of the Communist Spartacus League planned to travel to Morelia in order to join the Mexican Communist Party in support of the protest. The communists supposedly wanted to keep the movement alive to serve as an example for agitation against other state governors.⁵⁴ Intelligence agents from the Railroad Special Services department said that members of the Mexican Communist Party directed the protests.⁵⁵

Díaz Ordaz made a decision that would have significant consequences. He ordered the army to seize control of the University of Michoacán and had his soldiers arrest more than six hundred students and other participants.⁵⁶ Three of the students would remain in prison for years.⁵⁷ The former rector of the University of Michoacán, Alberto Bremauntz, who had retired two months before the army invaded the university, criticized Díaz Ordaz for his decision. He stated, somewhat presciently, that it set a “fatal precedent” for institutions of higher education in the country.⁵⁸

⁵³ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #330, “[student agitation in Morelia],” October 5, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁵⁴ Policia Judicial Federal, “[communist agitation in Morelia],” October 7, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁵⁵ Nicolas Castillo Ibarra, “[PCM activities reports from Ferrocarriles Servicios Especiales],” October 11, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁵⁶ “Michoacán se Organiza.”

⁵⁷ Lucio Rangel Hernández, *La Universidad Michoacana y el movimiento estudiantil, 1966-1986* (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2009), 174.

⁵⁸ Alberto Bremauntz, *Setenta años de mi vida: Memorias y anécdotas* (Mexico City: Ediciones Jurídico Sociales, 1968).

President Díaz Ordaz sent in the army because he was afraid that the student activism would spread from Michoacán to other areas. After the university had been subdued, the sub-minister of the interior explained to two political officers from the U.S. embassy that Díaz Ordaz had unilaterally made the decision to send in the army. According to the Mexican official, the president believed in a Mexican version of the domino theory—if the governor of Michoacán fell, “the next week Guerrero, Yucatan, Oaxaca, Sinaloa, and Durango would go.”⁵⁹

Díaz Ordaz’s decision backfired. In February 1968, a group of more than a thousand students began a protest “March for Liberty.” They retraced the route that Mexican Independence hero Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla had travelled and demanded that the government release those still imprisoned after the University of Michoacán uprising. Once again, Díaz Ordaz called in the army and stopped the marching students.⁶⁰

Díaz Ordaz’s intelligence agents feared that the communists and socialists had footholds in other places as well. In a general summary of Mexican Communist Party activities that officials from the Department of Political and Social Investigations wrote at the end of 1966, they named two members of the party who had “intervened in all of the student movements that have occurred across the republic.”⁶¹ In 1967, the Federal Judicial Police reported that communist students from UNAM were traveling around the country advising their peers about state-level movements. They connected the UNAM

⁵⁹ U.S. Embassy--Mexico, “Conversation with Subdirector of Gobernación,” October 14, 1966, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 6, U.S. National Archives. For a concise explanation of the domino theory, see Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America’s Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 220-223.

⁶⁰ “Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos,” May 4, 1968, IPS Caja 2892 A, AGN.

⁶¹ “Actividades del Partido Comunista Mexicano,” 1966, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN.

students to agitation in Nuevo León, Chihuahua, Yucatán, Durango, and Sonora.⁶² The head of the Department of Federal Security relayed rumors that the Popular Socialist Party and Vicente Lombardo Toledano gave money and instructions to student agitators in the national teacher training college.⁶³

Throughout their presidencies, López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz both contended with the possibility and the reality of student activism. Their informants in the intelligence services and the Federal Police kept them abreast of actual uprisings and warned them about potential ones. When problems arose, both men solved them with a combination of concession and repression. Increasingly, Díaz Ordaz resorted to force in order to quell student activism, setting a precedent for worse to come.

THE NATIONAL CENTER OF DEMOCRATIC STUDENTS

In 1963, the city of Morelia hosted the first congress of the National Center of Democratic Students, a new organization that would become one of the most important student groups in the 1960s. It united activists from across the country, encouraging them to engage in political protests and coordinating their efforts. Intelligence agents kept a close watch on the CNED and blamed the organization for much of the agitation among students.

The Mexican Communist Party spearheaded the effort to create the National Center of Democratic Students when its leaders saw a need for a broad coalition in the universities. Members of the Mexican Communist Youth group began organizing the

⁶² Policia Judicial Federal, “[Communist student agitation throughout country],” May 24, 1967, GDO 207 (126), AGN.

⁶³ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[PPS involved in student agitation],” June 17, 1967, DFS, Exp 63-3-1-67, Leg. 5, Hoja 14, AGN.

CNED in the federal district in 1961. One of the leaders of the effort from outside the capital was a young member of the National Liberation Movement and the People's Electoral Front from Baja California named Rafael Aguilar Talamantes. Prior to the 1963 conference, Aguilar Talamantes had spent two or three months canvassing the Pacific coast of Mexico to spread the word to some seventy schools.⁶⁴

The conference of the National Center of Democratic Students that took place in Morelia in 1963 marked the organization's debut on the political scene. Two hundred and fifty delegates attended, representing one hundred thousand students across the country.⁶⁵ They hammered out a "Declaration of Morelia" in which they demanded "popular and scientific education" based on "concrete humanism, which sees the real person, the worker, the campesino, the laborer subjugated to the exploitation of his daily tasks...the humanism that tends to transform the socioeconomic structure to the benefit of the masses."⁶⁶

The call to arms exhorted students across the nation to unite in a democratic, pluralist organization independent of government control. Perhaps some of the authors of the CNED's "Declaration of Morelia" had read a similar document produced the previous year in the United States by the Students for a Democratic Society called "The Port Huron Statement."⁶⁷ Despite the shared emphasis on democracy and humanism, the

⁶⁴ Raúl Álvarez Garín and Gilberto Guevara Niebla, *Pensar el 68* (Mexico City: Cal y arena, 1988), 27. Álvarez Garín was one of the leaders of the CNED and helped write the group's Declaration of Morelia.

⁶⁵ Rivas O., *La izquierda estudiantil en la UNAM*, 282.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Annex 9, 779-784.

⁶⁷ Jeremi Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968: A Norton Casebook in History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 40.

Mexican student group was significantly more militant than the U.S. one, as demonstrated by the CNED's slogan—"fight while studying."

Although the National Center of Democratic Students originally purported to be an ideologically pluralist coalition, the communists used their numerical majority to dominate the organization. According to one of the leaders of the 1968 student movement, "the Communist Party of Mexico, instead of reinforcing consensus, instead of negotiating, applied the old rule of imposition, ruling by majority to present its own point of view as the official stance of the organization."⁶⁸ As a result, most of the other students withdrew from the CNED and the group essentially became a student wing of the Communist Party.

Intelligence agents and police connected the CNED to student agitation across the country. Reports from the Judicial Police claimed that members of the organization planned to stir up trouble in Veracruz. They also blamed CNED organizer Rafael Aguilar Talamantes for directing a student movement in the northern part of the country.⁶⁹ Agents from the Department of Political and Social Investigations tied Aguilar Talamantes to the student uprisings in Puebla and Michoacán, as well as agitation within the National University and the National Polytechnic Institute.⁷⁰ The head of the Department of Federal Security relayed a student leader's claim that the CNED "controlled twenty-two

⁶⁸ Guevara Niebla, *1968*, 167. On the CNED's transformation from a pluralist group to a communist one, see also Jardón, *1968*, 17; Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 230.

⁶⁹ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #383, "[communist student agitation]," March 16, 1965, GDO 203 (122), AGN; Policia Judicial Federal, "Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos," April 5, 1965, GDO 203 (122), AGN.

⁷⁰ "Antecedentes de elementos del Partido Comunista Mexicano: Rafael Aguilar Talamantes," April 19, 1965, IPS Caja 2892 A, AGN.

schools or faculties of the UNAM, that is, seventy-five percent of the student body.”⁷¹ Another intelligence agent noted that the National Center of Democratic Students cooperated with the Federation of Socialist Campesino Students of Mexico in the rural teaching colleges across the country.⁷²

Government agents showed particular concern about the question of the CNED’s role in the October 1966 student uprising at the University of Michoacán. The democratic student center had, after all, held its first conference in Morelia and named its founding declaration after the city. Shortly after the strikes broke out, the CNED issued a manifesto, which agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations read closely, marking the most incriminating sections with a red pen. The officials underlined the CNED’s demands, including the removal of the governor of Michoacán. They also highlighted the student organization’s battle cry: “We call upon all of the forces of the student movement, all the political personalities, all the responsible Mexicans, to fight along with the future of our country for these demands, to express their dissatisfaction with the present situation.”⁷³

Government officials intervened when they saw leaders of the Michoacán uprising taking steps to extend the agitation to other parts of the country. Intelligence agents reported that the CNED was forming propaganda brigades in the federal district and posting the manifesto on the walls of the National Polytechnic Institute and the

⁷¹ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[PCM connections with students],” June 15, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-4-66, Leg. 16, Hoja 293, AGN.

⁷² “[CNED activities, plans to control students],” September 15, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-142-66, Leg. 2, Hoja 190, AGN.

⁷³ CNED, “Manifiesto de la CNED,” October 13, 1966, IPS Caja 2862 A Exp 15, AGN.

national teacher training college.⁷⁴ Police arrested CNED leader Rafael Aguilar Talamantes for directing the student uprising in Morelia and kept him in prison for years.⁷⁵

Government officials paid a great deal of attention to the National Center of Democratic Students as tensions mounted in the months leading up to the 1968 student movement. In May of that year, agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations wrote a comprehensive summary of the activities of the CNED, to which they attached short biographies of some twenty leftist leaders associated with the group. The intelligence officers described the members of the organization as “young people of extremist tendencies affiliated with the Communist Youth and the Mexican Communist Party.” They claimed that since the CNED’s creation five years prior, the “group of agitators” had intervened in various student uprisings across the country and had sent representatives to pro-communist events, especially in Cuba, where they received instructions to increase student agitation in Mexico. The agents also maintained that the student organization’s secretary of foreign relations had received nine thousand pesos from the Cuban embassy to help fund subversive activities.⁷⁶

The information in the biographies attached to the summary also painted an ominous picture of the group’s activities and intentions. One of the CNED’s leaders was trying to “lead the unsuspecting students down the path of violence.” Another encouraged his fellow group members to use “any pretext to incite the student body to violence.” A law student claimed that his peers were initiating a new political phase of “battle against

⁷⁴ IPS, “[CNED propaganda activities],” October 20, 1966, IPS Caja 2862 A Exp 15, AGN.

⁷⁵ “Actividades de la Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos,” 1966, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN.

⁷⁶ “Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos.”

the university authorities and the federal government.” Another from Sinaloa led a meeting where he told the audience that violence was the only way for the workers and campesinos to achieve their economic liberation. Others accused President Díaz Ordaz of “falsely representing the hopes of the Mexican people and exploiting campesinos and workers.” These could have been just empty words and threats, but the intelligence agents also believed that many of the CNED’s leaders had travelled to Cuba for guerrilla or “terrorist” training.⁷⁷

Intelligence reports about the National Center of Democratic Students reveal a number of characteristics of the nation’s security apparatus in the 1960s. Agents were quick to see conspiracies: government officials connected the CNED to student movements across the country and even blamed some of the most important ones, like the uprising in Michoacán in 1966, directly on the student group. Instead of looking at local causes, the government’s eyes and ears focused on communist conspiracy theories. Especially after the surprising success of the Cuban Revolution, intelligence agents paid close attention to connections between student agitators and Cuban communists.

THE CUBAN CONNECTION

Like their counterparts around the world, many Mexican students found inspiration in the Cuban Revolution.⁷⁸ They embraced the new spirit of adventure and

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ On the international impact of the Cuban Revolution, see Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*, Rev. ed. (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001); Eric Zolov, “Expanding Our Cultural Horizons: The Shift From an Old to a New Left in Latin America,” *A contra corriente* 5, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 47-73; Bernard Diederich, *1959: The Year That Inflamed the Caribbean* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009); Kepa Artaraz, *Cuba and Western Intellectuals since 1959* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso, 1993).

independence that Fidel and Che embodied. They followed news about the island and organized rallies, meetings, and marches in celebration of the revolution. In addition, many Mexican students had direct contact with Cubans. Some met with embassy officials, while others traveled to the island. As student activism became more problematic throughout the 1960s, government officials increasingly wondered: Are the Cubans to blame?

When Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós made a state visit to Mexico in June 1960, students helped lead the effort to welcome him. A huge crowd gathered at the airport in Mexico City, eagerly awaiting his arrival. They chanted, cheered, and hoisted signs. A group from the National School of Agriculture displayed a banner that read: “If Cuba needs agricultural soldiers, [we] can provide them!” Thousands of students followed Dorticós from the airport to his hotel, where they obliged him to give a short speech.⁷⁹ The head of the Department of Federal Security reported that many teachers shared their students’ enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution; he noted before Dorticós’s visit that seventy professors from UNAM were preparing to publish a manifesto of “solidarity and sympathy” in the newspapers of the federal district.⁸⁰

Students’ fervor for the Cuban Revolution only increased as tensions mounted between Castro and the United States. When the United States cut its quota of Cuban sugar in July 1960, some four thousand students held a protest in Mexico City. They marched through the streets of the city center, trailed by fifty intelligence agents. The

⁷⁹ “Relaciones Exteriores: Dorticós en México,” *Política*, June 15, 1960; “México respeta la autodeterminación, dijo ayer López Mateos: Dorticós es desde ayer huésped de nuestro país,” *Excélsior*, June 10, 1960.

⁸⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[activities planned by leftist groups to celebrate Dorticós’s visit],” June 1, 1960, DFS, Exp 11-4-60, Leg. 10, Hoja 104, AGN.

demonstration ended in a violent confrontation between the students and the police and grenadiers who were waiting at the entrance to the National Palace when the demonstrators announced their intention to burn an American flag.⁸¹

Police violence prompted further protests. Three days later, twice as many students held another pro-Castro demonstration. They demanded that the Mexican government take the Cuban side in the conflict with the United States and that the head of the police department be forced to resign for his role in the recent violence. Hundreds of police, grenadiers, secret agents, and firefighters awaited their arrival in the Zócalo. They dispersed the crowd, but about a thousand protestors then went to the offices of two conservative newspapers and pelted them with stones.

President López Mateos felt concerned enough to make an oblique reference to student activism in the State of the Union address that he delivered a little over a month after the violent confrontations. “There is a noble restlessness among the young generation to take part in national life outside the sphere of their specific activities,” he observed. “But some of their worries,” he continued, “tend to be erroneously directed against the revolutionary effort or driven by examples of distant struggles and peoples distinct from our own.” He smugly explained that “some” countries in the world were currently fighting for goals that the Mexican Revolution had already achieved.⁸² Although the president did not specifically criticize students’ enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution, he made it clear that they should not seek to follow Castro’s example, especially since Mexico’s earlier revolution had supposedly made such actions unnecessary.

⁸¹ “Homenaje a Cuba,” *Política*, August 1, 1960.

⁸² “El Lic. Adolfo López Mateos, al abrir el Congreso sus sesiones ordinarias, el 1o de septiembre de 1960,” in *Los presidentes de México ante la nación*, vol. 4 (Mexico City: Cámara de Diputados, 1966).

López Mateos's warning did little to dampen student enthusiasm for Cuba. The graduating class from the National University of Agriculture named Fidel Castro their *padrino* and invited the Cuban ambassador, Dr. José Antonio Portuondo, to their closing ceremonies.⁸³ Young members of the Mexican Communist Party and the Popular Socialist Party began a campaign in December of 1960 to form volunteer brigades to send to Cuba in case of an attack upon the island.⁸⁴ A month later, nine student organizations in the state of Nuevo León organized a five-hundred-person demonstration of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and sent a telegram to López Mateos asking him to defend the island.⁸⁵

Mexican students reacted loudly and in some cases violently to the news of the Bay of Pigs invasion. As many as eighty thousand people—mostly students—attended ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas's demonstration in the Zócalo.⁸⁶ The head of the Department of Federal Security compiled a list of all the organizations that had participated in the Student Front in Defense of the Cuban Revolution, which included people from the National University, the National Polytechnic Institute, the national teacher training college, and the communist and socialist parties.⁸⁷ The front claimed to have recruited a thousand people to send to Cuba's defense.

⁸³ "Educacion: Chapingo y Cuba," *Política*, December 1, 1960. A *padrino*, or godfather, is the symbolic leader of a graduating class.

⁸⁴ "El Pueblo, con Cuba," *Política*, January 15, 1961.

⁸⁵ "Nuevo León: En apoyo de Cuba," *Política*, February 1, 1961.

⁸⁶ See Chapter One of this dissertation.

⁸⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[student protests against Bay of Pigs invasion]," April 19, 1961, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 172, AGN.

Demonstrations protesting the Bay of Pigs invasion touched off bloody confrontations and arrests in the nation's capital, Puebla, Jalisco, and Baja California. Groups of students in Puebla, Michoacán, and Chihuahua attacked buildings associated with the United States such as newspaper offices, embassies, and cultural exchange institutes. A reporter from the magazine *Política* estimated that over one million people across the country participated in protests, many of them students.⁸⁸

In contrast, Mexican students responded quietly to another major international event—the Cuban Missile Crisis. Some of the nation's most important leftist organizations tried to drum up support for Cuba when the standoff began. A general in the Ministry of National Defense reported that members of the National Liberation Movement were organizing pro-Cuban meetings and public demonstrations across the federal district and on the UNAM and IPN campuses.⁸⁹ The head of the Department of Federal Security claimed that the National Liberation Movement was distributing a “great quantity” of propaganda protesting the American blockade to students at the National University, the Polytechnic Institute, and the national teacher training college.⁹⁰ The MLN also reportedly organized a conference in cooperation with the National Polytechnic Institute, titled “Cuba: World War Three?” Members of the Mexican Communist Party distributed propaganda to students, and Vicente Lombardo Toledano,

⁸⁸ “El país, con Cuba.”

⁸⁹ General de División Agustín Olachea Aviles, “[MLN activities in Federal District during missile crisis],” October 25, 1962, IPS Caja 1475-A, Exp 27, AGN.

⁹⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN distributing propaganda among students],” October 25, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 9, Hoja 4, AGN.

the head of the Popular Socialist Party, made public declarations blaming the United States for the crisis.⁹¹

Despite all these efforts, Mexican students showed none of the fervor and outrage about the Cuban Missile Crisis that they had displayed against the Bay of Pigs invasion. Students' reactions to the nuclear standoff demonstrated that their support of Cuba was not automatic or unlimited. Only a hundred or so students attended the pro-Cuba conference that National Liberation Movement held during the missile crisis.⁹² In this case, the stakes were higher and Cuba was no longer the clear victim. Like people across the continent, Mexican students condemned the introduction of nuclear weapons into Latin America. The missile crisis brought home the very real danger of the Cold War.

While most students had quietly agreed with Mexican leaders' alignment with the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis, they made their approval of their government's foreign policy loud and clear when Mexico came to Cuba's defense in 1964. After the Mexican government refused to follow the Organization of American States' resolution that all members should break diplomatic relations with Cuba, students joined the nation-wide chorus of support. Professors and students from the School of Economics of the National University sent a telegram to President López Mateos commending the "practical attitude of your government in solidly opposing the subordination of Mexico's most precious interests to the provocative and interventionist

⁹¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[PCM propaganda protesting Cuban Missile Crisis]," October 26, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-4-62, Leg. 12, Hoja 141, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Lombardo Toldedano's declarations about the Cuban Missile Crisis]," October 23, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-2-62, Leg. 10, Hoja 235, AGN.

⁹² Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[MLN Pro-Cuba act during Cuban Missile Crisis]," October 25, 1962, DFS, Exp 11-6-62, Leg. 9, Hoja 5, AGN.

politics of those who wish to set themselves up as governors of the Cuban people.”⁹³ At a meeting of young members of the Mexican Communist Party and the People’s Electoral Front, one attendee stated that maintaining relations with Cuba was “the only thing for which we are grateful to the president.” He also reported that students across the country were carrying out a proselytizing campaign on behalf of Fidel Castro.⁹⁴

Mexican students continued to display their dedication to the Cuban cause throughout Díaz Ordaz’s presidency. An agent from the Judicial Police reported that tensions between the United States and Cuba in 1966 over the issue of Guantánamo Bay could provide a pretext for communist agitation in the universities.⁹⁵ Another official claimed that young members of the Mexican Communist Party were trying to organize recruitment centers to send student volunteers to fight in Cuba.⁹⁶ Police prevented a pro-Cuba demonstration organized by the communist party, the editors of the magazine *Política*, and leaders of the National Center of Democratic Students. The groups of students who tried to attend the demonstration held impromptu “lightning meetings” throughout the capital instead, cheering for Cuba and yelling insults at the president like “Death to Díaz Ordaz!”⁹⁷ Perhaps the president saw their anger as a taste of what could happen if he cut relations with Cuba.

⁹³ “Unidad nacional,” *Política*, August 1, 1964.

⁹⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[PCM and FEP members praise Mexico’s Cuba policy],” September 3, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 11, Hoja 156, AGN.

⁹⁵ Policía Judicial Federal and Agente #430, “[communist agitation in universities about Cuba],” May 30, 1966, GDO 205 (124), AGN.

⁹⁶ Policía Judicial Federal and Agente #399, “[communist recruitment for defense of Cuba],” May 30, 1966, GDO 205 (124), AGN.

⁹⁷ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[PCM clashes with police over pro-Cuba acts],” June 10, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-4-66, Leg. 16, Hoja 279, AGN. For a warning from the Judicial Police about the meeting, see Policía Judicial Federal, “[Students organizing pro-Cuba event],” June 9, 1966, GDO 205 (124), AGN.

Another intelligence report reinforced the impression that Díaz Ordaz's position on Cuba affected his popularity among the student population. An agent of the Judicial Police claimed that students at the National University, even those in circles traditionally opposed to the government, had been making favorable comments about Díaz Ordaz's denial of rumors that he was about to break relations with Cuba.⁹⁸ The report suggested that by appearing to defend Cuba, the president was able to gain some respect from even the most contentious, intractable students.

Mexican students once again demonstrated their affinity with the Cuban Revolution when they learned that Che Guevara had met his end while trying to spark a guerrilla movement in the mountains of Bolivia. On walls and fences across Mexico City, a grieving population painted signs declaring that Che was not dead and that he would always be on the front lines of battle. UNAM students held numerous gatherings in which they mourned Guevara's death and recounted the stories of his heroic deeds. They sang the "song of the guerrilla" in his memory: "I want them to bury me like a revolutionary, wrapped in a red flag and with my rifle by my side."⁹⁹

Though all observers could agree that the Cuban Revolution as an event and an ideal had influenced Mexico's younger generation, the role that actual Cubans played in students' daily lives was less clear. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz heard repeatedly from their intelligence agents that Cubans fomented student activism. The revolutionary rabble-rousers supposedly provided everything from encouragement to money and training.

⁹⁸ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #430, "[student approval of maintenance of relations with Cuba]," December 12, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁹⁹ "La presencia del Che en México," *Política*, October 15, 1967.

Some of the most detailed and alarming information came from disaffected employees of the Cuban embassy. In 1960, the air attaché told agents of the Department of Federal Security that the cultural and military attachés took advantage of all subversive movements in Mexico in order to encourage agitation. He also claimed that student members of the Communist Youth of Cuba traveled constantly to Mexico to agitate Mexican students, providing money and communist orientation.¹⁰⁰

When the commercial representative of the Cuban embassy, Pedro L. Roig, defected, Mexican intelligence agents asked about student contact with the embassy. Roig replied that the students worked with people in the cultural and press departments, so he did not know much about their activities.¹⁰¹ In a book that he published two years later, however, Roig somehow obtained or recalled more details about embassy officials' interactions with students. He claimed that the cultural department was the "point of contact and penetration of the universities and colleges of Mexican higher education."¹⁰² Roig specifically accused Teresa Proenza, the cultural attaché to the embassy, of recruiting supporters and promoting conflicts in the universities.

A U.S. diplomat seconded the disaffected Cubans' warnings about meddling in student affairs. In an hour-long meeting with López Mateos in December 1961, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Thomas C. Mann raised the issue of Cuban connections with Mexico. Speaking of Castro's subversive capabilities, he referred to "Mexican intelligence of undoubted reliability that [the] Cuban ambassador recently summoned

¹⁰⁰ "Entrevista efectuada con el Sr. Manuel Villafaña, agregado aereo de la Embajada de Cuba en México," September 22, 1960, DFS, Exp 76-3-60, Leg. 1, Exp 229.

¹⁰¹ "Declaraciones de Pedro L. Roig," June 12, 1962, IPS Caja 1456-A, Exp. 1, Hoja 56, AGN.

¹⁰² Pedro L. Roig, *Como trabajan los espías de Castro: Como se infiltra el G2* (Miami: Duplex Paper Products of Miami, 1964), 85.

Mexican students to the Cuban embassy and lectured them on their failure to agitate effectively to earn monies given them by the Cuban embassy.”¹⁰³

Mann used this piece of evidence obtained from U.S.-Mexican intelligence cooperation to argue that the Cubans and the communists were organizing opposition not only to the United States, but also “against the PRI party and Mexico itself.”¹⁰⁴ López Mateos did not deny the possibility of Cuban agitation. Instead, he merely replied that the best way to counter the “communist danger” was to improve the general standards of living.

Mexican intelligence about the Cuban embassy’s role in student agitation was in ample supply throughout the 1960s. In 1962, the head of the Department of Federal Security claimed that leftist students at UNAM publicized meetings using a printing press that the Cuban embassy had provided.¹⁰⁵ Agent 450 of the Federal Judicial Police reported that communists controlled by the Cuban and Soviet embassies backed the efforts of the National Center of Democratic Students to spark an opposition movement.¹⁰⁶ He also said that the Cuban embassy served as a sort of post office for correspondence between student groups in Havana and UNAM.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Thomas Mann, “Mexico City to Department of State,” December 17, 1961, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

¹⁰⁴ On U.S.-Mexican intelligence cooperation, see Chapter Six of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁵ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[Cuban Embassy helped provide UNAM students with a printing press],” August 18, 1962, DFS, Exp 63-1-62, Leg. 18, Hoja 195, AGN.

¹⁰⁶ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #450, “[Communist embassies directing student activities],” March 25, 1965, GDO 203 (122), AGN.

¹⁰⁷ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #450, “[Cuban embassy distributing mail from Havana],” August 12, 1965, GDO 202 (121), AGN.

Intelligence officials argued that Cubans were involved in all of the major student protests of the decade. In 1966, officials of the Department of Federal Security took note of the Cuban ambassador's attempt to make a phone call to one of the main student agitators in the University of Puebla.¹⁰⁸ Two years later, the agents related a conflict between leaders of the National Center of Democratic Students over the misappropriation of funds that they had received from the Cuban embassy for their ill-fated "March for Liberty." The author or authors of the intelligence report about the march concluded that "one way or another, the reality is that the embassy in question, which should be removed from the activities of political groups in our country, intervenes directly, supporting them, in violation of its diplomatic commitments."¹⁰⁹

Like the Cuban embassy in Mexico City, Cuban consulates throughout the country worried government officials. The head of the Department of Federal Security reported in 1962 that the Cuban consul in Mérida, Yucatán, practiced communist indoctrination of local students.¹¹⁰ In another report on the subject, DFS agents elaborated that the consul in Mérida showed the students communist propaganda films, invited them to meetings and parties, and offered to pay for trips to Havana.¹¹¹ Agents suspected the consul in Tampico, Tamaulipas, of trying to form a group of Cuban sympathizers among students of the University of Tampico.¹¹² They reported that the consul in the port of

¹⁰⁸ "Asunto--Embajada de Cuba," July 8, 1966, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

¹⁰⁹ "La embajada de Cuba y la marcha estudiantil por la Ruta de la Libertad," February 2, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

¹¹⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[investigation of Cuban Consul in Yucatán]," April 27, 1962, DFS, Exp 12-9-962, Leg 11, Hoja 241, AGN.

¹¹¹ "[activities of Cuban Consuls]," n.d., IPS Caja 2958 D, AGN.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Veracruz was practicing “communist proselytism” among students in the states of Veracruz and Puebla and providing trips to Cuba to “train young Mexicans in the arts of sabotage and terrorism so that when they return home they can spread this doctrine.”¹¹³

Mexican officials also believed that the Cubans had created new student organizations for their own purposes. The head of the Department of Federal Security submitted a series of reports in which he claimed that the Cuban embassy, in cooperation with Mexican leftist leaders, had organized a new student group called the Latin America Movement.¹¹⁴ According to the intelligence director, the Cubans provided instruction on agitation, in addition to communist propaganda and guerrilla manuals.¹¹⁵ The embassy also covered the costs of the student leaders’ “constant trips” to Cuba.¹¹⁶

According to the intelligence director, the Cuban embassy’s investments in the Latin America Movement paid noteworthy dividends. Among its activities, the student organization held pro-Cuba rallies and showed movies about the amazing technical advances that the socialist countries had made.¹¹⁷ The group’s members supposedly spent their meetings concocting sinister plots for agitation among the students of Jalisco and Baja California.¹¹⁸ Adding insult to injury, the Cuban-sponsored Latin America

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento America Latina,” May 18, 1961, DFS, Exp 63-1-61, Leg. 14, Hoja 74, AGN.

¹¹⁵ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento America Latina,” July 10, 1961, DFS, Exp 63-1-61, Leg. 14, Hoja 178, AGN.

¹¹⁶ Rangel Escamilla, “Algunos aspectos de la situación que prevalece en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.”

¹¹⁷ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento America Latina,” November 28, 1961, DFS, Exp 63-1-61, Leg. 16, Hoja 1, AGN.

¹¹⁸ Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento America Latina.”

Movement also distributed propaganda “attacking the minister of the interior, saying that he was a deaf and dumb accomplice to the clergy’s violation of the constitution.”¹¹⁹ The minister of the interior at the time was none other than Gustavo Díaz Ordaz.

A final aspect of student connections with Cuba that worried government officials was the possibility that young protestors were receiving training in guerrilla warfare. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz knew that the Cubans provided this type of “education” to revolutionaries from other countries who travelled to the island.¹²⁰ They also knew that some Mexican students and educators made frequent trips to Cuba or stayed there for extended amounts of time. Perhaps they were receiving guerrilla training during their stays?

Intelligence agents stoked Mexican leaders’ fears about the Cubans spreading their revolutionary tactics. In the months leading up to the 1964 presidential elections, an official from the Department of Political and Social Investigations recommended keeping a close watch on a professor in Morelia, Michoacán, named José Herrera Peña. The man in question had supposedly spent two years in Cuba “practicing organizing guerrillas” and even received a diploma as a “technician of social organization” in Havana before returning to Mexico. The agent tied Herrera Peña to the latest bout of student unrest in Morelia, claiming that the professor had organized shock brigades and introduced the phrase “University or Death,” which subsequently became popular among the students. Police had arrested the professor for his role in the uprising, but the intelligence reports indicated that he had been released and became chief editor of a local newspaper.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Movimiento America Latina,” July 8, 1961, DFS, Exp 63-1-61, Leg. 14, Hoja 177, AGN.

¹²⁰ On Mexican knowledge of Cuba’s efforts to export revolution, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

¹²¹ “[vigilance of agitators],” June 6, 1964, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN.

José Herrera Peña was not the only Mexican who had apparently begun using guerrilla warfare tactics learned in Cuba. A number of the people on the master list of “communist agitators” that the Department of Political and Social Investigations compiled before the 1964 elections were educators who had both travelled to Cuba and become involved in student activism. One professor and leader of the youth wing of the Mexican Communist Party had reportedly made two trips to the island in 1962 and 1964 and taken a course on guerrilla warfare during the second trip. According to the intelligence agents, this Cuban-trained educator had “participated in all of the student movements from 1958 to the present.” Another professor on the list had also made two trips to Cuba and participated in student agitation in Morelia. According to the intelligence report, he had “incited students against federal and state authorities” over a loudspeaker, provoking a confrontation that led to the death of one student and injuries to six others.¹²²

In addition to educators, a few students with connections to Cuba also made the master list of communist agitators. A political science major at UNAM who was a member of the Mexican Communist Party had travelled to the island, as had his mother and sisters. An active member of the People’s Electoral Front, he had helped campaign for the opposition party’s presidential candidate. Another member of the FEP, a high school student in Acapulco, was reportedly “trying to get sent to Cuba for political indoctrination.”¹²³

The prospect of Mexican students receiving guerrilla training from Cubans continued to trouble government officials during Díaz Ordaz’s administration. Agent 399

¹²² “Antecedentes y actividades de elementos agitadores comunistas,” 1964, IPS Caja 1573 A, AGN.

¹²³ Ibid.

of the Federal Judicial Police reported in 1966 that members of the youth wing of the Mexican Communist Party were planning a trip to an enormous secret base in Oaxaca. A number of Cubans supposedly owned more than twenty thousand hectares there, most of which they employed for guerrilla training exercises using an “infinite number of high-power weapons” that they had amassed.¹²⁴ According to the agent, the visit to the camp was to be a reward for the students’ participation in different movements.

Even government officials outside the intelligence organizations kept an eye out for subversion among Mexican students. In 1967, the governor of the federal district forwarded a report about guerrilla training to the Department of Political and Social Investigations. According to the document, a group of at least eight Mexican students had recently arrived in Mexico City from Havana, where they had taken a course in revolutionary warfare. “All of them are under orders to undertake a campaign of proselytism and training in the art of guerrilla warfare among their fellow students in various regions of our country,” the report warned.¹²⁵

Cuba was thus closely connected with student activism in Mexico in the 1960s, at least in the eyes of Mexican government officials. The Cuban Revolution provided inspiration—new heroes, new tactics, and a new cause. The desire to defend the island from the United States’ imperial aggression brought students to their feet and into the streets across Mexico. But it did not stop there. If the intelligence reports and allegations of former Cuban officials were true, then Castro offered more than just an example to restless Mexican students. It appeared, at least to Mexican officials, that the Cubans were

¹²⁴ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #399, “[Cuban guerrilla training camps in Oaxaca],” May 20, 1966, GDO 205 (124), AGN.

¹²⁵ “[Guerrilla training in Cuba],” June 9, 1967, IPS Caja 2966 B, AGN.

providing propaganda, money, and even guerrilla training. Intelligence agents continued to provide evidence of Cuban interference throughout the 1960s, even during the most important crisis of the decade—the student movement of 1968.

CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE 1968 STUDENT MOVEMENT

July 26 would turn out to be a momentous day in both Cuban and Mexican history. On that date in 1953, Fidel Castro made an ill-fated attack on the Moncada Barracks that marked the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. Fifteen years later, a battle between students and police ignited a protest movement that spread across Mexico City and threatened to embarrass the government on the eve of the Olympic Games. Intelligence agents did not fail to note that the simmering student agitation came to a boil on Cuba's independence day. They concluded that students' admiration of the Cuban Revolution had finally been transformed into imitation. During and after the 1968 Mexican student movement, intelligence agents produced voluminous evidence that connected the uprising to Cuba.

Mexican intelligence agents were already well aware of the inspiration that Cuba provided students around the world and at home. They had witnessed the yearly gatherings of thousands of students to celebrate the Cuban Revolution. They had noted that every time the island came under attack, Mexican students rallied to its defense.

Some intelligence agents looked abroad to explain Cuba's influence on Mexican student activism. In May 1968, officials of the Department of Political and Social Investigations clipped and translated an article from *The London Times* titled "Guevara: Symbol of Eternal Political Youth." They underlined a few sections of the lengthy article that related specifically to Cuba. "Generally speaking, the new young radicals are

impatient with the organization, discipline, and doctrinal obsessions of traditional communism,” the author observed. “If they look to Che Guevara it is because he seems to mean improvisation, excitement, permanent revolution, and the automatic destruction of incipient organization.” Another part of the article that the intelligence agents underlined called Cuba “the mecca to which every serious radical must at some point make his pilgrimage.”¹²⁶

Some who would become leaders of the 1968 student movement had in fact made “pilgrimages” to the mecca of Cuba in prior years. In January 1966, Castro had hosted a Tricontinental Congress of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹²⁷ Heberto Castillo Martínez, the head of the National Liberation Movement and a professor of engineering at UNAM, led the Mexican delegation. His promises to “undertake a fight to the death against imperialism” in the Mexican university, penal, and electoral systems landed in the pages of both the leftist press and the intelligence files.¹²⁸

The Tricontinental Congress was not the first time that Heberto Castillo appeared in Mexican intelligence files in connection to Cuba. Shortly after the Bay of Pigs invasion, the head of the Department of Federal Security reported that Castillo led efforts to create an organization for the defense of Cuba.¹²⁹ In 1962, when agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations interviewed former Cuban embassy

¹²⁶ Richard Davy, “Guevara: Symbol of Eternal Political Youth,” *The London Times*, May 28, 1968. Located in IPS Caja 2943 B, AGN.

¹²⁷ On the Tricontinental Congress, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

¹²⁸ “Discursos de los jefes de las delegaciones a la Conferencia Tricontinental: México,” *Política*, February 15, 1966; “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968,” 1968, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN.

¹²⁹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[creation of an organization in defense of Cuba],” April 24, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-6-61, Leg. 4, Hoja 36, AGN.

employee Pedro L. Roig, they specifically asked about Castillo. Roig told them that the engineering professor was in charge of finding and funding Mexican “technicians” to go to the island for training.¹³⁰ Heberto Castillo’s name continued to pop up in intelligence reports throughout the 1960s as he took control of the National Liberation Movement and maintained his efforts to drum up support for the Cuban cause.¹³¹

Intelligence officials’ concerns about Heberto Castillo increased after he returned to Cuba in August 1967 for the first conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization. IPS agents reported that he and his fellow attendees “proposed the worst sort of violence as the best solution to Latin American social development.”¹³² Perhaps they were referring to the declaration that the conference attendees produced, which boldly claimed that “armed warfare constitutes the fundamental path of revolution in Latin America.”¹³³ To add insult to injury, Castillo openly criticized the Mexican government and used derogatory tones when speaking of President Díaz Ordaz, intelligence agents reported.

Heberto Castillo was not the only person involved in the student movement with connections to Cuba, at least in the eyes of Mexican intelligence officials. On August 19, 1968, as the movement heated up, DFS agents composed a report based on the account of

¹³⁰ “Declaraciones de Pedro L. Roig,” June 12, 1962, IPS Caja 1456-A, Exp. 1, Hoja 56, AGN. The word “technicians” had quotation marks around it in the report.

¹³¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “[MLN supports Mexico’s position in OAS],” July 27, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-6-64, Leg. 12, Hoja 287, AGN; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[MLN conference about Cuba],” July 19, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-6-65, Leg. 14, Hoja 287, AGN; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[MLN and PPS meeting about Cuba],” May 31, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-6-66, Leg. 16, Hoja 182, AGN.

¹³² “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968.”

¹³³ “Declaración General de la Primera Conferencia de la OLAS,” *Política*, August 15, 1967.

an informant who wished to remain anonymous. The source claimed that the president of the Mexican Communist Party, Hugo Ponce de León, as well as a María Elena Díaz Alejo had each separately called the Cuban embassy to say that they were carrying out the student agitation. The Cuban official at the other end of the line cut them off, telling them not to discuss such matters over the telephone.¹³⁴

The connections to Cuba mounted. The next section in the report claimed that the director of the Political Science department at UNAM was a friend of Fidel Castro and a member of the Mexican Communist Party. This educator had supposedly signed one of the anti-government fliers circulating in the university and sent instructions about street fighting to the students. The informant named another friend of Castro who received correspondence from the Cuban embassy and participated in the disturbances. A third “Castro-ite” (castrista) also supposedly took part in the student revolt.¹³⁵

Intelligence agents suspected that Cubans encouraged the student movement in a number of ways, including the distribution of propaganda. On September 3, an official from the Department of Federal Security reported that two young Cuban women were working with a Mexican student to spread communist publications. The Mexican student supposedly made frequent trips to Cuba for this purpose.¹³⁶ There were, in fact, a number of references to Cuba among the propaganda of the student movement. In their marches and demonstrations, many of the students carried the famous photograph of Che Guevara looking resolutely into the distance. Others bore signs that read “Cuba, 1956, Moncada:

¹³⁴ “[people involved in student protests],” August 19, 1968, DFS, Exp 11-4-68, Leg. 32, Hoja 23, AGN.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “[Cuban propaganda distribution],” September 3, 1968, DFS, Exp 11-4-68, Leg 51, Hoja 164, AGN.

Mexico... When?” and “Che Has Not Died, He Lives Among Us.”¹³⁷ When police arrested Heberto Castillo, they interrogated him about the origins of posters of Che and Fidel and signs that read “A Man—Castro; An Island—Cuba; An Ideal—Communism.”¹³⁸ The posters demonstrated the students’ admiration of Cuba and desire to imitate their heroes.

Cuban embassy officials showed a great deal of interest in student propaganda. The Mexican intelligence files contain a report, in English, describing a meeting between a Mexican university student involved in the protests—“Silvia”—and the Cuban embassy’s cultural and press attaché and the commercial counselor. The meeting took place over breakfast in a popular local restaurant chain on the morning of September 15. Silvia brought examples of propaganda leaflets distributed by the striking students and the attaché looked them over, read some of the printed matter, and laughed heartily.¹³⁹

Silvia’s connections to the Cuban embassy predated the 1968 student movement. The intelligence report explained that she had been in contact with the previous cultural attaché, Abelardo Curbelo Padrón, a “known DGI.”¹⁴⁰ Curbelo was the same embassy employee who Mexican intelligence agents suspected of giving nine thousand pesos to the National Center of Democratic Students.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68: La criminalización de la víctimas: Genocidio y delitos de lesa humanidad, documentos básicos 1968-2008* (Mexico City: Comité 68 Pro Libertades Democráticas, 2008), 71, 74.

¹³⁸ “Interrogatorio de Heberto Castillo Martínez,” June 27, 1969, IPS Caja 2956, AGN.

¹³⁹ “Cuban Embassy Contacts with Mexican Leftist Students,” September 20, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* The Dirección General de Inteligencia, or DGI, was Cuba’s main intelligence agency.

¹⁴¹ “La embajada de Cuba y la marcha estudiantil por la Ruta de la Libertad”; “Central Nacional de Estudiantes Democráticos.”

Mexican officials feared that the Cubans might provide weapons to the students. According to a CIA cable, beginning in August the Mexican government put its navy and coastal military land units on alert for the possible infiltration of equipment from Castro. This action came in response to claims that “the Cuban government would attempt to infiltrate arms into Mexico for use by students and student sympathizers during a planned demonstration.”¹⁴² The fact that Mexican leaders decided to put the navy and army on alert suggests that they took the threat of Cuban interference in the student movement very seriously.

Finally, Mexican intelligence agents suspected that the Cubans provided money to leaders of the student movement. A few days after the Tlatelolco massacre, an agent of the Department of Federal Security submitted a report about a suspicious telephone call. A man who claimed to be on the coordinating committee of the student movement made a call to the Havana offices of *Granma*, Cuba’s state newspaper. He asked that the newspaper send him money and “clothing”—the DFS agent suspected that “ropa” was code for something else. The call came from a phone in the offices of the Ministry of Public Education, which added weight to the speaker’s claims of involvement in the student movement.¹⁴³

Intelligence agents suspected another Cuban news agency—*Prensa Latina*—of involvement in the student movement. A lengthy report about the organization written in 1969 claimed that employees of the news agency were “intensely dedicated to student

¹⁴² “Mexican Military Alert for possible Cuban infiltration of arms destined for student use,” August 24, 1968, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 60, Folder 6, Document 42c, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin [hereafter LBJ Library].

¹⁴³ Edmundo Durán Hernández, “Se informa sobre llamada a la Habana, Cuba,” October 7, 1968, DFS, Exp 12-9-68, Leg 18, Hoja 298, AGN.

issues.”¹⁴⁴ The report contained allegations that, under instructions from Havana, two representatives of *Prensa Latina* had travelled to Paris during the French student uprising of the spring of 1968. There, the Cubans had observed the methods used by the Parisian students and recruited some of them to go to Mexico to instruct students there. The French “instructors” had supposedly been involved in some of the earlier events of the Mexican student movement, until police arrested them. Even after the arrests and the climax of the movement in October, *Prensa Latina* maintained contact with Mexican students who distributed the Cuban news bulletin on the UNAM campus and fed information to the reporters.¹⁴⁵

Further evidence emerged of Cuban financial assistance to the 1968 student movement. In January 1969, agents from the Department of Political and Social Investigations reported that on September 10 of the previous year, an employee of the Cuban embassy had cashed a check from the National Bank of Cuba for over \$400,000 in the offshore Bank of the Atlantic. “This quantity was used in the financing of student disorders, especially to prepare actions that disturbed public order, most notably the meeting in Tlatelolco,” the report explained. Photocopied below the intelligence information was a list of Cuban embassy officials with descriptions in English. The next page of the report specified that a British bank had given the Bank of the Atlantic permission to cash the check; perhaps the information in English about embassy employees came from British sources.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ “Prensa Latina informe,” November 25, 1968, DFS, Versión Pública de Fidel Castro, Leg. 1, Hoja 295 and Exp 65-92-69, Leg. 3, Hoja 132, AGN. For more on *Prensa Latina*, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁵ “[Prensa Latina contacts with students],” May 4, 1970, DFS, Exp 65-92-70, Leg. 3, Hoja 241, AGN.

¹⁴⁶ “[Cuban financing of student movement],” January 16, 1969, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

U.S. intelligence agents, meanwhile, had come to the opposite conclusion that the Cubans were not significantly involved. On October 5, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson received a cable from the CIA that began: “There is no hard evidence that either the Cuban or Soviet embassies in Mexico City masterminded the current disturbances.” The message mentioned some unconfirmed reports that the Cubans had given “some moral or possibly financial assistance” but dismissed the likelihood of significant meddling.¹⁴⁷

According to the CIA, the Cubans had avoided antagonizing the Mexican government and appeared reluctant to jeopardize their relationship with its leaders. The only evidence of international interference that the report contained was, in the author’s words, “circumstantial”—the appearance of several expensive student advertisements in the Mexico City press that would have cost thousands of dollars. The CIA reasoned that the money for the ads could have come from domestic sources. U.S. intelligence contained no mention of hefty withdrawals from off-shore banks.

While U.S. investigators might have been convinced that the Cubans had little to do with the 1968 student movement, Mexican intelligence agents disagreed. They suspected embassy employees and press agents of providing intransigent students with inspiration, instruction, propaganda, and money. Multiple times during and after the student movement of 1968, intelligence agents told their superiors that the Cubans were helping students create trouble for the government. And yet Mexican leaders never publicly blamed Castro or his representatives. Instead, they painted a picture of an

¹⁴⁷ “Addendum to ‘Mexican Student Crisis,’” October 5, 1968, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 60, Folder 6, Document 56a, LBJ Library.

“international communist conspiracy.” The final section of this chapter will examine this conspiracy theory and the crucial role that Cuba played within it.

AN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY?

Before, during, and after the 1968 movement, Mexican leaders blamed student agitation on an international communist plot. Conspiracy theories could explain the explosion of activism by young people around the world in 1968. Such accusations also placed the blame on outside forces rather than internal problems. President Díaz Ordaz probably believed his own rhetoric about conspiracies; his intelligence agents certainly fed him enough information to that effect to justify concern. Some of the organizations and individuals that Mexican officials accused—publicly and privately—of participation in the international conspiracy had longstanding connections to Cuba.

There were two main groups whose participation in the student movement served as “evidence” of an international conspiracy: the Mexican Communist Party and the communist-controlled National Center of Democratic Students. According to a report by the Federal Judicial Police used later in the prosecution of student movement leaders, the CNED held its first plenary meeting in early July 1968 in the city of Morelia. Four people who would soon play significant roles in the student movement attended and vowed to carry out disturbances across the country in order to create trouble for the government. They reportedly agreed that every month, beginning in July, they would execute “a distinct movement of agitation and incitement to rebellion against the government of the

nation, with distinct pretexts such as support for Cuba and freedom for political prisoners.”¹⁴⁸

It appeared that the National Center of Democratic Students did not wait long to put its plan into action. The CNED, working in conjunction with the Mexican Communist Party, played a prominent role in encouraging the confrontation between students and police on July 26 that sparked the movement. The two communist groups had planned a march that day in the center of Mexico City to celebrate the anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. It took place around the same time as a completely unrelated student march, also downtown, to protest police brutality.

According to intelligence reports, the communists took advantage of the coinciding times and locations of the two demonstrations. First, two students who were members of both the Communist Party and the National Center of Democratic Students tried to invite the student protestors from the second march to join their pro-Cuba rally. When that failed, leaders of the groups formed a plot to infiltrate the other protest and convince the students on the spot to join the pro-Cuba rally.¹⁴⁹ They planned to threaten businesses, provoke the police, and blame the students. The members of the PCM and CNED reportedly agreed to arm themselves with sticks and stones to repel police.¹⁵⁰

Intelligence agents concluded that the communists’ plan had worked when a number of the students from the student march joined the rally celebrating Cuba. The

¹⁴⁸ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68*, 54. This book contains the text of the trials of the leaders of the student movement, including the prosecution’s case and main pieces of evidence.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. The description of the events of July 26 cited above came from a report from the head of the Department of Federal Safety, dated July 31, 1968, and labeled Parte Policiaca No. 10, Tomo II, Foja 337.

¹⁵⁰ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[PCM recommends that pro-Cuba marchers arm themselves],” July 25, 1968, DFS, Exp 11-4-68, Leg. 23, Hoja 359, AGN.

pro-Castro speakers criticized the Mexican police and government, inciting the crowd to violence. The combined group headed for the Zócalo. According to the government version of the events, the students broke windows and looted stores along the way until the riot police intervened.¹⁵¹

Other witnesses contended that the police initiated the violence and destruction, even attacking students uninvolved in the demonstrations. The students fled and took refuge in a few nearby schools, where they engaged in a prolonged battle with security forces.¹⁵² Fighting lasted until the early morning hours of the next day, then broke out again across the city when students learned that some of their comrades had been killed, injured, and arrested.

As a result of the police's brutality, the uprising spread to schools and universities across the city and country. Students seized buses, barricaded streets, and started preparing Molotov cocktails.¹⁵³ The army stepped in and escalated the violence: one group of soldiers even used a bazooka to blast open the doors of a high school.¹⁵⁴ Within a few days the CNED and PCM had apparently achieved their goal of producing a massive movement against the government.

From the very beginning, government officials claimed to be victims of an international communist conspiracy. On the night of July 26, police raided the offices of the Mexican Communist Party, the communist newspaper *La Voz*, and the National

¹⁵¹ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68*. See also Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 239.

¹⁵² Jardón, 1968, 30.

¹⁵³ "Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968."

¹⁵⁴ Mabry, *The Mexican University and the State*, 244.

Center of Democratic Students. “We are facing an international communist conspiracy,” the chief of police told the press. Other officials seconded this claim, including the general prosecutor, Julio Sánchez Vargas, and the minister of the interior, Luis Echeverría.¹⁵⁵ Judge Eduardo Ferrer Mac-Gregor issued an arrest warrant for fifteen leaders of the Communist Party and National Center of Democratic Students for the crimes of damaging property, attacking public transportation, criminal association, and sedition. The warrant specified that they committed these offenses while trying to disturb public order and embarrass the national government in order to install a communist regime.¹⁵⁶

Obliging members of the press picked up on the idea of an international conspiracy. Eduardo Arrieta of *El Universal Gráfico* published an article entitled “The 26 of July in Mexico,” in which he claimed that “the young people of Mexico City were pushed by groups known to be interested in undermining order and national institutions.” He sympathized with the thousands of residents of Mexico City who found their daily routines interrupted by the “unruly youngsters” and bemoaned the destruction of school and office buildings. “There was a plan,” he concluded. “It is no mere coincidence that during these days one of the many groups of instigators of the chaos took part in the anniversary celebration of the extinct 26 of July Movement.”¹⁵⁷ Articles in *Excelsior*,

¹⁵⁵ Jacinto Rodríguez Manguía, *1968: Todos los culpables* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2008), 30-31; “Mexican Students Fight Riot Police,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1968.

¹⁵⁶ Judge Eduardo Ferrer Mac-Gregor, “[arrest order for Communists],” August 13, 1968, IPS Caja 1456 A, AGN.

¹⁵⁷ Eduardo Arrieta, “‘26 de Julio’ en México,” *El Universal Gráfico*, August 2, 1968.

Novedades, *Ovaciones*, *Revista de América*, and *Sucesos* all echoed the theme of communist agitation.¹⁵⁸

President Díaz Ordaz promulgated the theory of an international conspiracy in his State of the Union address on September 1, 1968. “It is evident,” he contended, “that non-student hands have intervened in the recent disturbances.” Díaz Ordaz also explained to his national audience how the recent violence throughout the country was part of a worldwide trend:

We situate these events within the frame of international information about similar bitter experiences in a great number of nations in which, from the beginning or after trying various solutions, they had to resort to force and only in that way were able to end the disturbances.¹⁵⁹

The comparison to other countries contained a clear warning: the Mexican government was also ready to use force if necessary.

In blaming the student movement on an international conspiracy, Díaz Ordaz and his agents either willfully or unconsciously ignored the real causes of the protests. The students strove to make their goals clear, issuing a public list of demands. It included the release of political prisoners, the removal of the head of the police, the disbanding of the riot police, the elimination of the crime of “social dissolution” from the constitution, and

¹⁵⁸ Guillermo Estrada Unda, “76 agitadores rojos que instigaron los disturbios estudiantiles están detenidos; Algunos de ellos son extranjeros,” *Novedades*, July 28, 1968; Adolfo Olmedo Luna, “Los rojos intentan azucar más al estudiantado,” *Ovaciones*, July 30, 1968; “El estado no puede permitir; ¿castrismo mexicano?,” *Excélsior*, July 31, 1968, sec. Editorial; “Ingerencia de agentes extranjeros; Financió los motines el Partido Comunista; Sobornó a líderes de los estudiantes; La policía investiga; Sólo en la CU se reanudaron las clases,” *Excélsior*, July 31, 1968; Raúl Torres Duque, “Los disturbios estudiantiles, pretexto para insidiosa campaña en el extranjero,” *Ovaciones*, August 2, 1968; Francisco A. Gomez Jara, “Un ‘mayo rojo’ para el Politécnico,” *Sucesos*, August 10, 1968; “Los mexicanos; Presente y pasado de las conjuras,” *Revista de América*, August 24, 1968.

¹⁵⁹ “Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, al abrir el Congreso sus sesiones ordinarias, el 1o de septiembre de 1968,” in *México a través de los Informes Presidenciales*, vol. 1: Los Mensajes Políticos (Mexico City: Secretaría de la Presidencia, 1976).

compensation for the families of victims of government repression.¹⁶⁰ In response, President Díaz Ordaz refused to meet with the student leaders or listen to their criticism of his government. Instead, he continued to blame their protests on outside intervention.

The cries of “international communist conspiracy” became a chorus after the October 2 massacre in the Plaza of Tlatelolco, when the government needed an excuse for the violence. The minister of agriculture called the student riots “an international conspiracy to discredit Mexico,” and the governor of the Federal District claimed that students were being paid by “forces outside the country.”¹⁶¹ The Senate declared that “professional agitators” and “national and international elements who pursue extremely dangerous anti-Mexican goals” were to blame.¹⁶²

The main piece of evidence that the senators provided for their conclusion was the supposed presence of high-powered weapons among the students. *El Universal* also reported that police found a great quantity of Russian weapons in the plaza.¹⁶³ *La Prensa* claimed that police had arrested some foreigners with rifles and machine guns.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Guevara Niebla, *La democracia en la calle*, 39.

¹⁶¹ Ignacio Quiroz, “Los motines callejeros son una conspiración internacional para desprestigiar a la Nación; Gil Preciado hizo ante los agricultores y los campesinos de la Laguna un realista exámen,” *El Sol de México*, October 5, 1968; “Se ataca a México desde el exterior; El titular de la SAG relaciona lo de aquí con el caso checo,” *Excélsior*, October 5, 1968; Homero Bazan Viquez, “Fuerzas ajenas al país detras del llamado conflicto estudiantil: Minoría pagada para quemar camiones, dice Corona del Rosal,” *El Heraldo de México*, October 6, 1968.

¹⁶² Luís Ernesto Cárdenas, “Declaración de la Gran Comisión del Senado sobre los recientes disturbios habidos en la capital,” *El Nacional*, October 4, 1968.

¹⁶³ “Gran cantidad de armas de fabricación rusa, decomisadas,” *El Universal*, October 3, 1968.

¹⁶⁴ “Extranjeros detenidos con rifles y ametralladoras,” *La Prensa*, October 4, 1968.

Journalists from *El Herald de México* blamed the violence on a “band of foreign agitators” and alluded to the presence of “Guevara in Tlatelolco.”¹⁶⁵

Government officials’ internal communications reflected the same conspiracy theory that they broadcasted to the public, suggesting that Díaz Ordaz and others might have genuinely seen themselves as victims of an international plot. A month after the end of the movement, police arrested Arturo Martínez Nateras, a known communist and secretary of foreign relations of the National Center of Democratic Students. Intelligence agents had been watching him for years and had noted his participation in various student uprisings, as well as his frequent trips to Cuba “for guerrilla training.”¹⁶⁶ He was also the student who had received thousands of dollars from the Cuban embassy for CNED activities in early 1968. The police reported that when they arrested him in November of 1968, Martínez Nateras possessed papers that he had authored that “revealed the direct influence that the Communist Party had played in the entire movement and in the activities of the National Strike Council.”¹⁶⁷

A general summary of the 1968 student movement that agents of the Department of Political and Social Investigations composed at the end of the year contained additional evidence of communist involvement. The author or authors of the report accused the Mexican Communist Party and the National Center of Democratic Students of providing propaganda and orientation to the student movement. “There is an abundance of portraits of Che Guevara and [Demetrio] Vallejo, political propaganda in

¹⁶⁵ “Banda extranjera de agitadores, causa de los disturbios,” *El Herald de México*, October 3, 1968; Agustín Barrios Gomez, “Guevara en Tlatelolco,” *El Herald de México*, October 4, 1968.

¹⁶⁶ “Arturo Martínez Nateras,” July 20, 1967, IPS Caja 2892 A, AGN.

¹⁶⁷ “[PCM influence in student movement],” November 11, 1968, DFS, Exp 11-4-68, Leg. 57, Hoja 111, AGN.

documents and phrases, signed by the CNED,” intelligence agents affirmed. Describing a protest march, the officials claimed that “the columns [of students] were protected with cordons and watched by militants of the Communist Party of Mexico and the Communist Spartacus League, who gave them orders to insult President Díaz Ordaz.”¹⁶⁸ A separate report about the communist party claimed that it received money from members throughout the country, which it passed along to the leaders of the National Strike Council.¹⁶⁹

The state’s attorney who tried the leaders of the student movement bought into the theory of an international conspiracy. Drawing primarily upon intelligence reports and semi-reliable confessions of students, the prosecution accused a whole group of defendants of participating in a “subversive plan of international scope.” This plot was supposedly elaborated outside of Mexico and implemented by the defendants “as leaders or members of the political organizations known as the Mexican Communist Party, the National Center of Democratic Students, the National Liberation Movement...” and so on, down the line of left-wing organizations, ending with the National Strike Council. The prosecutor alleged that the conspiracy aimed to install a communist government.¹⁷⁰

Some of the state’s key evidence of an international plot involved Cuba, reflecting the belief that Castro and his collaborators had a hand in the Mexican student rebellion. The first piece of evidence of a conspiracy that the prosecutor presented to the court was an edition of the Cuban newspaper *Granma* with the declarations of the First Conference

¹⁶⁸ “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968.”

¹⁶⁹ “Partido Comunista Mexicano,” 1968, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN.

¹⁷⁰ Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68*, 36.

of the Latin American Solidarity Organization, held in Havana in 1967. He noted that the Mexican delegation had included Heberto Castillo Martínez, one of the defendants. The prosecutor read some of the proclamations of the solidarity organization, including the one declaring the “right and responsibility” of the people of Latin America to undertake revolution and the one specifying the Marxist-Leninist orientation of said revolution.¹⁷¹

Despite the prosecutor’s emphasis on the actions of groups and organizations, it was actually specific members of left-wing or communist organizations, rather than the groups as a whole, who played significant roles in the student movement. This became increasingly evident as the pluralistic National Strike Council emerged as the organizing force of the movement, rather than the Mexican Communist Party or the National Center of Democratic Students. The pre-existing organizations took a back seat to the new strike council.

In reality, the majority of the leaders of the student movement were not associated with communist groups, but some important and highly visible exceptions existed. CNED leader Arturo Martínez Nateras reportedly stood out in meetings in which students suggested the need to take up arms “because the second phase of the Mexican Revolution had already begun.”¹⁷² Communist professors Heberto Castillo Martínez and Eli de Gortari led a group of educators who participated in the movement. Leftist journalist and erstwhile editor of *Política* Manuel Marcué Pardiñas was at the front of the marches and provided the students with propaganda.¹⁷³ Jesús Manuel Ovilla Maldujano, a member of

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷² “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968.”

¹⁷³ Carlos Perzabal, *De las memorias de Manuel Marcué Pardiñas* (Mexico City: Editorial Rino, 1997), 53.

the Communist Party and the National Center of Democratic Students, headed up brigades of UNAM and IPN students who visited high schools, private schools, and provincial schools to gain adherents for the movement. Dr. Fausto Trejo, a teacher and member of the communist party, spoke at numerous demonstrations.¹⁷⁴

The theory—or pretext—of an international plot had staying power. One of the main instigators of the Plaza de Tlatelolco massacre later claimed that he had defended the country against an international communist conspiracy. General Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza served as the chief of Díaz Ordaz’s Presidential Guard and was most likely the person who ordered government officials with submachine guns to hide in the buildings around the plaza.¹⁷⁵ Twenty years after the fact, when he published his memoirs, he contended that Mexico had been suffering from “an acute communist infiltration” of numerous organizations, especially the educational system.¹⁷⁶ The communists’ main goals supposedly included toppling the regime and sabotaging the Olympic Games. “Since the beginning of the government of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz,” he explained, “the radical Left... received precise orders from international communism to take advantage of the preparations for the Olympics in order to carry out in Mexico the part that the country had been assigned in the Worldwide Revolution.”¹⁷⁷

General Gutiérrez Oropeza placed most of the blame for student agitation on Lázaro Cárdenas and Heberto Castillo Martínez. He claimed that they began

¹⁷⁴ “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968.”

¹⁷⁵ Scherer García and Monsiváis, *Parte de guerra*, 42. Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 269.

¹⁷⁶ Gutiérrez Oropeza, *Díaz Ordaz: el hombre, el gobernante*, 26.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

incorporating prominent educators and students into “Russian communism” when they founded the National Liberation Movement in 1961.¹⁷⁸ As further evidence of an international conspiracy, Gutiérrez Oropeza mentioned that Heberto Castillo had attended the Tricontinental Congress in Cuba, where he had praised the use of armed warfare to gain power. Following the congress in Havana, Castillo then supposedly joined Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in a tour around Mexico, speaking with students and campesinos in order to gain adherents for a “hidden aggression against the government.” Gutiérrez Oropeza concluded that, as a result of Castillo’s tour of Mexico and visits to Cuba and the Soviet Union, communists had been able to take over the universities of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, Sinaloa, UNAM, the National Polytechnic Institute, and the National Teaching College.¹⁷⁹

General Gutiérrez Oropeza explicitly blamed Lázaro Cárdenas, Heberto Castillo, and the communists for the student movement of 1968. He claimed that Castillo and the other teachers were confident that they could take advantage of the student conflict to stage a revolution in Mexico. Cárdenas, meanwhile, had supposedly provided aid and encouragement, in addition to convincing the UNAM rector to support the students. Gutiérrez Oropeza offered a bleak vision of what would have happened if Heberto Castillo and his followers had been allowed to triumph. “Beginning that fateful year, Mexico would have fallen into the communist orbit and we would now be another Cuba or Nicaragua.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

In his unpublished memoirs, President Díaz Ordaz also insisted that his country was the target of an international conspiracy. These personal writings were not for public eyes and consequently probably contain the most candid information available regarding the president's mindset. According to an historian who obtained the memoirs, President Díaz Ordaz was convinced that the head of the Mexican Communist Party had received specific orders at an international meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1967 to agitate among Mexican students for the purpose of disrupting the Olympic Games. The major responsibility for the student movement thus lay, in the president's eyes, with "international communist groups," especially "pro-Soviets and pro-Maoists." He also believed that the international communist movement funneled money to the students through the Cuban and Russian embassies.¹⁸¹

Díaz Ordaz believed that Heberto Castillo Martínez took charge of enacting the communist conspiracy. He blamed the engineering professor for students' temporary seizure of the Zócalo on the night of August 27. He believed that on that occasion Castillo had established a claim to "maximum, indiscriminate, almost untouchable authority."¹⁸² Díaz Ordaz interpreted a party on the UNAM's campus on September 15 to celebrate Mexican Independence as Heberto Castillo's next step in creating a separate government. He believed that students had called Castillo "the Little President." "I realized," Díaz Ordaz reminisced, "that if we have 'little presidents'... then they could form a 'little State' with a 'little President' within a State."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ One of the few people to gain access to Díaz Ordaz's memoirs is Mexican historian Enrique Krauze. This dissertation's analysis of the president's musings is based on the information in Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 707.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 713.

Díaz Ordaz's personal version of the events of October 2 accorded with his theory of an international conspiracy. He claimed that the students, armed with submachine guns, had attempted to seize the Ministry of Foreign Relations, whose headquarters overlooked the Plaza de Tlatelolco.¹⁸⁴ He denied the presence of police and soldiers in the buildings surrounding the plaza, insisting that there were only "young idealists" shooting down on their own people. In his conclusions about having fulfilled his duty, the president summarized what he saw as the crux of the conflict: "They want to change this Mexico of ours. They want to change it for another which [sic] we do not like. If we want to preserve it and we remain united, they will not change what is ours."¹⁸⁵ Who was the vague "they" that Díaz Ordaz blamed? Communists? Students? The rest of his memoir suggested that both groups tried to alter Mexico.

Díaz Ordaz made similar vague references to conspiracies when answering questions about the student movement in an interview he gave shortly before leaving office. When asked whether the government's response came too late, he answered "Look, this so-called student movement...let's start from the beginning: those subversive attempts of 1958 and 1959, based in the workers' syndicates, failed. At that moment, the decision was made to concentrate all the attention on the students." The rest of the president's response continued in the same vein, always using the passive voice to avoid specifying the exact culprits. He saw the student uprising as part of a long-standing plot. "An intense activity was undertaken since [1958 and 1959] to try to add the students to the attempts at subversion," Díaz Ordaz contended.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 722-725.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 723-725.

¹⁸⁶ Carlos Aguilar Rodríguez, *Gustavo Díaz Ordaz: Su pensamiento, su palabra* (Mexico City, 1988), 100.

In the president's eyes, those in charge of subverting Mexico's younger generation had achieved their purpose. "They succeeded in leading the students to violence," he told the interviewer.¹⁸⁷ Díaz Ordaz claimed that throughout his decade in power, first as minister of the interior and then as president, the government had used political methods to address the student problem. But by 1968 those methods were no longer enough. According to his account, someone had been determined to create problems for Mexico, using either workers or campesinos or students. "Their" efforts finally succeeded with the third group, and a reluctant government was forced to respond.

Other government officials, however, were less obsessed with communist conspiracies. The man who was minister of defense in 1968, General Marcelino García Barragán, presented his version of the events in a letter to his son, which journalists Julio Scherer García and Carlos Monsiváis eventually obtained and published. According to the minister of defense, other government officials deserved the blame for most of the problems with the students. Minister of the Interior Luis Echeverría supposedly instructed the UNAM rector to lead a student demonstration in August in order to justify the army's interventions at the end of July. "[Echeverría] did not imagine when he created this Civil Hero [the rector], that the consequences would be tragic for the country," General García Barragán reflected.¹⁸⁸ The minister of defense also asserted that General Gutiérrez Oropeza had posted officials with submachine guns in the buildings surrounding the Plaza de Tlatelolco on orders from Díaz Ordaz.¹⁸⁹ The only time García Barragán mentioned communists was when he claimed that the UNAM rector had "heard the song

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Scherer García and Monsiváis, *Parte de guerra*, 40.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 44.

of the communist sirens” and had begun to believe himself an actual hero of the people.¹⁹⁰ García Barragán accepted his own responsibility for the violent confrontation with the students, while also blaming Minister of the Interior Luis Echeverría and President Díaz Ordaz.¹⁹¹

General García Barragán’s belated confession of his own culpability was rare in government circles; both during and after the 1968 student movement, most Mexican leaders stuck closely to the story of an international communist conspiracy. This theory allowed them to place the blame for Mexico’s problems outside the country. It enabled them to avoid taking a hard look at some of the failings of the Mexican educational and political system. Vague claims of a “conspiracy” also served another purpose—they circumvented explicit accusations of any one possible culprit—say, Cuba—and instead sent the blame out into the international ether.

CONCLUSION

The Mexican student movement of 1968 climaxed more than a decade of activism. A young generation, inspired by local grievances and international influences, staged an on-going, hydra-like challenge to authorities. Government officials responded with the customary combination of concession and repression, but, increasingly, violence became the order of the day.

In explaining government leaders’ response to the student movement, it is necessary to examine their perceptions of it. The man at the center of the crisis, President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, saw himself and his country as targets of an international

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

communist conspiracy. His intelligence agents told him that communist groups and individuals were subverting Mexican students. They told him that the reds were providing orientation, propaganda, money, and training.

An international communist conspiracy would not be complete without the participation of Latin America's most prominent communist country—Cuba. Díaz Ordaz's agents informed him that Cubans were involved in student agitation from the beginning. Most of this subversion supposedly came from the Cuban Embassy and from trips that Mexicans made to the island for guerrilla training. Díaz Ordaz could have put an end to these two sources of Cuban influence by cutting Mexico's diplomatic relations with the island. And yet, he chose not to. He also decided not to share with the public any of the evidence he possessed of Cuban involvement.

Had Díaz Ordaz wanted to cut relations with Cuba, the 1968 student movement would have provided a perfect excuse. He and the rest of the Mexican government clearly sought someone or something to blame for student activism, and Castro would have been a very plausible scapegoat. The fact that Díaz Ordaz passed up both these opportunities suggests that he set great store in his nation's relations with Cuba. Diplomatic ties with Castro helped shore up the Mexican regime's revolutionary reputation at a time when it desperately needed such window dressing. In addition, the president might have feared that if he cut relations, he would face increased threats from the Cubans and the Mexican students. Díaz Ordaz weighed the risks and opportunities, and ultimately decided to direct his wrath at a target closer to home—the students.

Chapter Five: Cuba's Relations with Mexico

“With the government of Mexico we are disposed to converse and discuss... we are disposed to compromise, to maintain a policy subject to norms, inviolable norms of respect for the sovereignty of each country”

--Fidel Castro, “Declaration of Santiago de Cuba,” 1964

In 1985, Cuban president Fidel Castro sat down for a lengthy interview with a journalist from Mexico's premier newspaper, *Excélsior*. Asked to reflect on relations between the two countries, Castro had nothing but praise for his neighbors. He repeatedly described the relationship as “exceptional,” reminding the reporter that Mexico was the only Latin American country that had not cut ties with Cuba in the 1960s or joined the economic blockade against the island. “For me, everything that has to do with Mexico is something that I always treat with great respect, with great care, and with all the delicacy possible,” Castro explained.¹

Fidel Castro's comments serve as an important reminder that the Mexican government was not the only party involved in shaping foreign relations between Cuba and Mexico—Cuban leaders played an equally important role. Castro's policy toward Mexico was, as he put it, exceptional. As his country became increasingly isolated in the Americas, it became ever more crucial for Castro to maintain his connections to Mexico. Yet, in his efforts to take advantage of that bridge, Castro frequently risked angering his

¹ Fidel Castro Ruz, *La cancelación de la deuda externa y el nuevo orden económico internacional como única alternativa verdadera. Otros asuntos de interés político e histórico* (Havana: Editora Política, 1985), 65.

sole defenders by using Mexico in his efforts to export revolution to the rest of Latin America.

What role did Castro and other Cuban officials play in shaping their country's relations with Mexico? How exactly did they benefit from the connection, and why did they risk severing it? The subject of Cuban foreign policy has received extensive attention from historians and political scientists, but the vast majority of scholarship focuses either on Cuba's relations with its allies or its enemies.² Mexico was exceptional in that it acted as both friend and foe of the Cuban Revolution. Mexican leaders appeared to be Castro's only defenders in the hemisphere, yet Castro knew that they were covertly cooperating with the United States. Analyzing Cuba's foreign relations with Mexico contributes to efforts to move the literature beyond the one-dimensional ally-or-enemy dichotomy and provides new insight into the island's connections with the outside world.

Telling the story of the two countries' relations from a Cuban perspective presents a distinct methodological challenge. Cuban archives are notoriously difficult to access,

² Some of the best treatments of Cuban foreign policy are exceptions to this trend, including Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, eds., *Cuba in the World* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).

The studies of Cuba's relations with the United States are too numerous to list, as are the examinations of Cuban-Soviet Relations. Overviews include Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The United States and Cuba: Intimate Enemies* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); James G. Blight, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); D. Bruce Jackson, *Castro, the Kremlin, and Communism in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969); W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba: Interests and Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1985).

Biographies of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara can provide useful insight into Cuban foreign relations as well. See Paul J. Dosal, *Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997); Jorge Castañeda, *Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Maurice Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Morrow, 1986).

especially for U.S. scholars researching sensitive, post-revolutionary topics. Cuban officials rarely confide their secrets to U.S. historians seeking interviews. Published records such as newspapers and speeches remain the only window onto the public face of Cuba's foreign relations with Mexico. For the rest of the story, this chapter attempts to fill the gaps with information from the memoirs of former Cuban officials and declassified U.S. and Mexican government records.

Cuba's foreign relations with Mexico were ambivalent; just as Mexican leaders were both friends and foes to Castro, so was he to them. He praised Mexico's government in his public speeches and exempted it from his tirades against "the lackeys of Yankee imperialism." At the same time, he exploited the ties between the two countries to build an international wire service and export revolution to other parts of Latin America. His agents frequently crossed the line and interfered in Mexico's internal affairs, directly contradicting Castro's pledges of mutual non-intervention. Castro maintained relations with Mexico despite his private misgivings because the connection helped him promote and spread his revolution.

THE PUBLIC FACE OF CUBA'S RELATIONS WITH MEXICO

Fidel Castro seized every opportunity to convey his gratitude to the Mexican government and people for their defense of Cuba. Throughout the early years of his regime, he made numerous positive references to Mexico. Occasionally, Castro exaggerated when describing the ties between the countries, but he always returned to the same basic message—as long as the Mexican government treated him with respect, he would respond in kind.

Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos pleased Castro when he invited Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós for a state visit. In a televised speech in June 1960, Castro thanked President López Mateos for the warm reception and the “generous attitude” that he had adopted toward Dorticós.³ Castro went on to praise the people of Mexico for their proud history of resistance, referring specifically to the venerated “Niños Héroes,” or heroic children. These were six young men who had chosen death over surrender at the end of their ill-fated defense of the Castle of Chapultepec in 1847 during the Mexican-American War.⁴ By reminding his audience of the wrongs that Mexico had suffered at the hands of the United States, Castro tried to convey the message that Cuba and Mexico had a common enemy.

A speech about Cuba by a Mexican congressman prompted further displays of gratitude. When the United States cut the island’s sugar quota, the president of the permanent commission of the Mexican Congress, Emilio Sánchez Piedras, declared that even though their neighbors to the North were turning their backs on Cuba, the Mexican people never would.⁵ In response, Castro expressed “eternal gratitude” to the people and

³ “Castro TV Speech on Havana Channel 2,” June 11, 1960, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600611.html>.

⁴ On the “Niños Héroes,” see *El asalto al castillo de Chapultepec y los niños heroes* (Mexico City: Departamento del Distrito Federal, 1983); *En defensa de la patria* (Mexico City: Comisión Organizadora de los Homenajes del CL Aniversario de los Niños Héroes, Secretaría de Gobernación, Archivo General de la Nación, 1997); José Manuel Villalpando César, *Niños héroes* (Mexico City: Planeta, 2004). For a bibliography of the vast literature on the Mexican-American War, see Norman E. Tutorow, *The Mexican-American War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981). More recent works include *The View from Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989); José Manuel Villalpando César, *Las balas del invasor: La expansión territorial de los Estados Unidos a costa de México* (Mexico City: Miguel Angel Porrúa, 1998); Paul W. Foos, *A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁵ “Líderes de la revolución mexicana contra los EEUU,” *Revolución*, July 8, 1960.

government of Mexico for their solidarity.⁶ Trucks decorated with the Cuban and Mexican flags circled the streets of Havana. Around four thousand Cubans gathered in front of the Mexican embassy, waving flags and signs that read “Viva México” and “Thank You to Our Mexican Brothers.” The most important organizations in Cuba, including the Confederation of Cuban Workers, the 26 of July Movement, the Federation of University Students, and the Popular Socialist Party, all signed a letter to the Mexican ambassador, thanking him for his country’s support. “The people and government of Mexico have once again demonstrated their devotion to defending the age-old principles of independence, the right to non-intervention, and social progress that were the basis of the Mexican Revolution,” the letter read.⁷

On other occasions, Castro overplayed his hand in describing the friendship between Mexico and Cuba. In late March 1961, he gave a speech at a banquet in Havana in which he praised the Latin American Peace Conference that had just taken place in Mexico City. Castro claimed that ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas had sworn that peasants across Mexico were ready to take to the mountains to defend the Cuban Revolution should the United States attack.⁸ Castro was probably trying to warn U.S. leaders that an invasion of Cuba would risk igniting a continental war throughout the Americas.

⁶ Fidel Castro Ruz, “Optimistic Castro Interviewed on TV,” July 9, 1960, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600711.html>.

⁷ “Cuba: ‘Gracias, México’,” *Política*, July 15, 1960; Harold K. Milks, “Cubanos felices por lo que dijo Sánchez Piedras: Para demostrarlo hacen en La Habana manifestaciones,” *Excelsior*, July 9, 1960.

⁸ Fidel Castro Ruz, “Castro Warns Against Hemispheric War,” March 25, 1961, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610325.html>. Castro did not specify whether the peasantry would go to the Mexican or Cuban mountains, but the context of the rest of the speech implies that he was referring to the former.

Castro's claim about peasants taking to the mountains, farfetched as it was, prompted an immediate backlash in Mexico. Headlines blared: "Castro Ruz Threatens Total War" and "Castro Believes He Has the Support of Spanish America."⁹ Editorialists described his claims as ravings, and leaders of peasant organizations called Castro a liar and his statements absurd.¹⁰ The head of the Mexican Federation of Agricultural Organizations accused the Cuban revolutionary of interfering in Mexico's internal politics. The president of the Mexican Anticommunist Party reportedly filed a complaint with the state's attorney about Lázaro Cárdenas, using Castro's speech as evidence that the ex-president was betraying his country.¹¹

The furor grew so great that Cárdenas decided to step in. He sent a statement to *Excélsior* condemning the excessive reaction to Castro's speech. Cárdenas explained that Castro's claims were not the ravings of a madman, but rather were firmly rooted in the final declarations of the Latin American Peace Conference. Furthermore, Cárdenas attested that during his post-conference tour of Mexico, he had indeed heard avowals of support for Cuba from various sectors of the population. There was therefore nothing wrong with Castro's statement; the negative news coverage consisted of "speculations at the margins of reality." Cárdenas dismissed the Anticommunist Party's accusations as well, describing them as false charges that would self-destruct.¹²

⁹ Robert Berrellez, "Castro Ruz amenaza con 'guerra total': Dice que en México cuenta con el apoyo del General Cárdenas," *Excélsior*, March 27, 1961; "Castro cree tener el apoyo de Iberoamérica: Los campesinos irán a la montaña si EU lo ataca, afirma," *Excélsior*, March 26, 1961.

¹⁰ "Los desvaríos de Fidel Castro," *Excélsior*, March 28, 1961, sec. Editorial; "Califican de absurdo la declaración de Castro, de que en México será defendido," *Excélsior*, March 28, 1961.

¹¹ "Consignación del General Cárdenas a la Procuraduría," *Excélsior*, March 27, 1961.

¹² "Habla Lázaro Cárdenas," *Excélsior*, March 31, 1961.

Cárdenas's defense of Castro elicited palpable gratitude in Cuba. Newspapers across the island printed the text of the ex-president's letter to *Excélsior*.¹³ The semi-official news organ, *Revolución*, accompanied Cárdenas's declaration with a four-page photo spread of his recent tour of the Mexican interior following the peace conference. The text and images displayed the peasantry's admiration for both the ex-president and for Cuba. The subtitle to a photograph of a group of Mexican campesinos proclaimed: "In these young people the significance of our revolution acquires extraordinary dimensions: they become excited at the mere mention of Cuba or Fidel Castro."¹⁴ The newspaper's editors tried to use Cárdenas's words and images to reinforce Castro's claims that Mexican peasants would defend him from attack.

In response to the uproar, Castro decided to soften his declarations about the loyalties of the Mexican peasantry. Less than two weeks after his controversial speech, he granted a pre-dawn interview to a Mexican journalist, during which he clarified his relationship with the Mexican government and people. "I said that the Mexican campesinos would rise against imperialism," Castro explained, "never against the government of Mexico, for whose president we feel all the respect he deserves." He maintained that he had no reason to interfere in Mexico's internal affairs, since the two governments enjoyed friendly relations. Castro reiterated his gratitude for the warm welcome that President Dorticós had received in Mexico the previous year and called López Mateos "the most dedicated defender of the principle of non-intervention."¹⁵ The

¹³ "Latinoamérica defendería a Cuba, ratifica Cárdenas: Riposta a ataques de lacayos contra Fidel," *Revolución*, April 1, 1961; "Difusión a la declaración de Lázaro Cárdenas," *Novedades*, April 2, 1961.

¹⁴ Lisandro Otero, "Con tata Lázaro por los caminos de México," *Revolución*, April 1, 1961.

¹⁵ Fernando F. Revuelta, "Semana Santa en La Habana," *Novedades*, April 5, 1961.

Cuban leader did everything he could to smooth the feathers he had ruffled with his impulsive statements.

As Castro's regime became more radical, he once again had to redefine his relations with Mexico. During a speech commemorating the success of the Cuban Revolution in January 1962, Castro took the opportunity to modify his message of mutual non-intervention with the Mexican government. By this point, Castro had already officially begun to embrace communism, which set his country on a different course from the rest of Latin America, including Mexico.

Instead of emphasizing the similarities between Mexico and Cuba as he had done before, this time Castro spoke about the two nation's respect for each other in spite of their differences. "There are other governments that do not necessarily have to think the same way we do, governments that represent social forms different from our own, but that still have a clear concept of sovereignty and national independence," Castro declared. Later in his speech, he referred more explicitly to his relations with Mexico, describing them as an example of how Cuba's dealings with the rest of Latin America might evolve. "There is one condition," he averred: "that they respect our sovereignty, refrain from interfering in our internal affairs, and do not organize campaigns of sabotage."¹⁶ If other countries followed these policies with regard to Cuba, Castro promised that he would return the favor.

Castro saved his most effusive declarations of gratitude for the moment when Mexico stood alone with Cuba against the rest of the hemisphere. In July 1964, when the member nations of the Organization of American States resolved to cut all ties with the

¹⁶ Fidel Castro Ruz, "Tercer aniversario: Texto del discurso pronunciado por el Comandante FIDEL CASTRO, el 2 de enero de 1962," *Boletín de Información de la Embajada de Cuba*, January 1962.

island, Mexico's government was the only one that refused to comply. Castro responded by lambasting the rest of the OAS in his "Declaration of Santiago de Cuba." He called the hemispheric resolution "an unprecedented, cynical act in which the victimizers claim to be judges in order to impose illegal sanctions against the victim."¹⁷ He warned that if the attacks and acts of sabotage did not cease, the people of Cuba would consider it their right to assist revolutionary movements in all the countries that practiced similar interference in Cuban affairs.

Castro showed equal passion when it came to praising Mexico for defying the Organization of American States. "We understand with all sincerity," he proclaimed, "that the current president of Mexico will go down in history, like the great president Lázaro Cárdenas, among the good and the great presidents that Mexico has had." Castro reiterated his respect for López Mateos and admiration for his country's history of resistance and revolution. "With the government of Mexico we are disposed to converse and discuss," he said; "we are disposed to compromise, to maintain a policy subject to norms, inviolable norms of respect for the sovereignty of each country."¹⁸ Mexico's defiance of the OAS resolution gave Castro a chance to demonstrate his willingness to respect governments that showed him the same courtesy.

The Cuban government's semi-official newspaper, *Revolución*, also celebrated Mexico's refusal to comply with the rest of the Organization of American States. Headlines praised Mexico's valor and proclaimed "Mexico Repudiates the Sanctions

¹⁷ "Declaración de Santiago de Cuba," *Política*, August 1, 1964.

¹⁸ Fidel Castro Ruz, "Ninguna autoridad moral ni jurídica tiene la OEA para tomar medidas contra Cuba: Discurso del primer ministro y primer secretario del Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista Cubana, Fidel Castro, el 26 de Julio de 1964," *Política*, August 1, 1964; "México mantuvo la posición más firme en su oposición a este acuerdo cínico," *Revolución*, July 27, 1964.

Against Cuba.”¹⁹ Articles quoted numerous Mexican leaders expounding upon the “ties of friendship” between the two countries and the need to resist the OAS’s “ignominious” actions. They published statements from writer Carlos Fuentes that his country’s defense of Cuba amounted to the greatest contribution that Mexico had made to the international order since the days of Lázaro Cárdenas.²⁰ The Cuban press dedicated pages and pages to the theme of Mexican-Cuban solidarity.

However, Castro’s private opinion was probably significantly less glowing than press coverage and public statements indicated. According to a disillusioned Cuban revolutionary who eventually fled the island, José Luis Llovio-Menéndez, Fidel had surprisingly negative things to say about Mexico. Llovio-Menéndez described a conversation at a dinner party in late December 1971 during which Castro called Mexico “a country going under because of its dependence on the *Yanquis*, governed by thieves without the least interest in true sovereignty.” Fidel described the Mexican diplomats in Havana as “scoundrels” who were making a fortune from exit visas and stolen jewelry. He described Mexico’s leaders as “lackeys” who allowed the CIA to photograph and harass Cuban officials as they entered the country.²¹ According to Llovio-Menéndez, Castro also still held a grudge from the time he had spent in Mexican prison when trying to launch his revolution back in 1956.

¹⁹ “México ha tenido el valor de mantener esa posición igual que Uruguay, Chile y Bolivia,” *Revolución*, July 27, 1964; “Rechazo a acuerdos de la OEA: Repudia México las sanciones contra Cuba,” *Revolución*, July 29, 1964.

²⁰ “Paro general obrero en Uruguay en apoyo a Cuba y contra la OEA: Piden que se mantengan relaciones; líderes de México elogían actitud de su gobierno contra el acuerdo anticubano,” *Revolución*, July 31, 1964.

²¹ José Luis Llovio-Menéndez, *Insider: My Hidden Life as a Revolutionary in Cuba* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), 271.

While it is possible that Llovio-Menéndez invented the conversation to make Castro look like a hypocrite, his description of the Cuban leader's complaints has a ring of truth. In the early 1960s, Cuban and Mexican officials debated whether Cuban diplomats could carry weapons in Mexico's airports. On at least four occasions, the conflicts escalated into scuffles, arrests, and seizures.²² The Mexican government did in fact allow the CIA to place a hidden camera at the airport to photograph everyone travelling to or from Cuba.²³ Furthermore, numerous Cubans seeking to leave the island complained that employees of the Mexican embassy in Havana charged exorbitant fees for exit visas.²⁴ The frustrations that Castro supposedly expressed over dinner in 1971 were indeed ones that members of the Cuban government had voiced in various forums over the years.

²² Gilberto Bosques, "[telegram from Mexican Embassy in Havana to Foreign Ministry about complaints that travelers to Cuba are being photographed in Mexico]," December 17, 1960, Folder III-5591-9, SRE; "[Prensa Latina employee arrested for carrying weapons in Mexico City airport]," August 19, 1961, DFS, Exp 65-92-61, Leg. 2, Hoja 29, AGN; Daniel Ramos Nava, "Incidente con 2 diplomáticos de Cuba desarmados en el aeropuerto," *Novedades*, December 9, 1961; José Gorostiza, "Diplomáticos cubanos desarmados en el aeropuerto de esta ciudad," December 14, 1961, Folder III—2867—16, SRE; Luis Echeverría, "[reply from Luis Echeverría to José Gorostiza about conflict between Cuban and Mexican officials in the airport]," January 29, 1962, Folder III—2867—16, SRE; "Dos diplomáticos cubanos desarmados en el aeropuerto," *Novedades*, August 4, 1962; "Diplomáticos cubanos que cargaban pistola, desarmados en el aeropuerto," *Excelsior*, August 4, 1962; Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "[telegram to Mexican embassy in Havana about Cuban diplomats bringing weapons to Mexican airports]," August 17, 1962, Folder III—2867—16, SRE.

²³ Anne Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History," November 16, 1978, RG 263 CIA Russ Holmes Work File Box 22 RIF 104-10414-10124, U.S. National Archives. For more on cooperation between the Mexican and U.S. governments against Castro, see Chapter Six of this dissertation.

²⁴ Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "[memorandum to Mexican embassy in Caracas about Mexican embassy in Havana charging Cubans for exit visas]," February 4, 1961, Folder III—2852—5, SRE; Gilberto Bosques, "[telegram from Mexican embassy in Havana to Foreign Ministry about accusations of charging for exit visas]," February 6, 1961, Folder III—2852—5, SRE; E. Rafael Urdaneta, "Cargos que formula un exluder obrero cubano contra personal de nuestra Embajada en La Habana, Cuba", March 21, 1962, Folder III—2852—5, SRE; E. Rafael Urdaneta, "Denuncia formulada por el señor Eduardo E. Sotolongo M., ex-asilado en la Embajada de México en La Habana", August 30, 1962, Folder III—2852—5, SRE; Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, "[report to Mexican president about ambassador to Cuba's activities]," July 24, 1967, SPR 540-Bis5, SRE.

Despite his enduring resentment over the day-to-day nature of relations between the two countries, Castro staunchly maintained his public posture of gratitude and respect toward the Mexican government. He was well aware that Mexican leaders' defense of his regime was largely symbolic, but he also knew how to use that symbolism for his own purposes. In the early years of his regime, he compared the two nations' revolutionary experiences as well as their exploitation at the hands of the United States. He argued that they had a common history and enemy. Later, once his government became increasingly communist, Castro stopped comparing his country to Mexico and instead began using their diplomatic ties to demonstrate his ability to maintain mutually respectful relations with dissimilar governments. He sent the message that he would not meddle in the internal affairs of countries that showed equal dedication to the principles of self-determination and non-intervention.

PRENSA LATINA

In addition to using diplomatic relations between Mexico and Cuba for rhetorical purposes, Castro also found practical ways to benefit from the relationship. As increasing numbers of countries cut ties with Cuba, Mexico became an important transit point for information coming to and from the island. Like U.S. leaders, Castro saw this connection as an opportunity. Before long, the Mexican government became the begrudging host to one of the central offices of Castro's new Latin American news agency—Agencia Prensa Latina.

Prensa Latina was Fidel Castro's attempt to seize control over information on a hemispheric and global scale. He began planting the seeds mere days after taking command of Cuba's government. In January 1959, Castro hosted a gathering of hundreds

of journalists from across Latin America. The conference, called “Operation Truth,” aimed to counteract the negative publicity that the Cuban leaders had been receiving for their executions of Batista’s collaborators. Castro exhorted his audience to challenge the dominant U.S. and European news agencies. “The press of [Latin] America should take control of the means that will permit them to know the truth and not be victims of lies,” he proposed.²⁵ Six months later, in June 1959, Prensa Latina was officially inaugurated in Havana and began its first transmissions to subscribers abroad.

The new wire service initially showed great promise. It expanded quickly, opening offices in nearly every country of the Americas by the end of 1959. Within a year, the directors of Prensa Latina had signed contracts with news agencies across Europe, Asia, and Africa as well.²⁶ By that time, the wire service was sending more than four hundred messages a day on average to more than two hundred newspapers, magazines, and radio stations, including *The New York Times*.²⁷ Prensa Latina worked with partners both big and small. In Mexico, for example, the wire service provided information to provincial papers such as *El Dictámen* of Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, as well

²⁵ CIA, “Cuba: Castro’s Propaganda Apparatus and Foreign Policy,” November 1984, Central Intelligence Agency FOIA Electronic Reading Room, www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000972183/DOC_0000972183.pdf; “Prensa Latina: Al servicio de la verdad--Antecedentes,” *Prensa Latina* (Havana, 2009), <http://www.prensa-latina.cu/Dossiers/Dossier50AnosPL/Antecedentes.htm>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Un Año de ‘Prensa Latina’,” *Política*, July 1, 1960.

as national magazines like *Política* and *Siempre*.²⁸ Observers surmised that Prensa Latina offered its service for free in order to increase its subscriptions.²⁹

The wire service at first purported to be a private, international enterprise. News articles about Prensa Latina claimed that it relied on Mexican, Cuban, and Venezuelan capital.³⁰ The first president of the enterprise was Mexican industrialist Guillermo Castro Ulloa, a former president of his country's chamber of commerce.³¹ According to Mexican intelligence officers, Castro Ulloa was in charge of funneling money to and from Cuba to cover the operating costs. In October of 1959, the arrangement soured when he pocketed \$100,000.³² Thereafter, funding began coming directly from Havana, frequently through more reliable channels in the Cuban embassies.³³

While Prensa Latina's finances belied claims of private ownership, the editorial direction of the news agency was more legitimately international. Among the founders were Argentine journalists Jorge Ricardo Masetti, Jorge Timossi, and Rodolfo Walsh. Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez, who would later win the Nobel Prize for literature, helped create Prensa Latina and represented the news agency in Bogotá and

²⁸ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Investigación acerca de la agencia noticiosa 'Prensa Latina,'" December 26, 1962, DFS, Exp 65-92-62, Leg. 2, Hoja 216, AGN.

²⁹ "Prensa Latina informe," November 25, 1968, DFS, Versión Pública de Fidel Castro, Leg. 1, Hoja 295 and Exp 65-92-69, Leg. 3, Hoja 132, AGN; "How Castro Pushes 'Hate U.S.' All Over Latin America," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 2, 1960.

³⁰ "Un Año de 'Prensa Latina'."

³¹ "Prensa Latina informe;" CIA, "Cuba: Castro's Propaganda Apparatus and Foreign Policy."

³² "Prensa Latina informe."

³³ CIA, "Agencia Informativa Latinoamericana (Prensa Latina)," April 1960, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Prensa Latina receiving money from Cuba]," January 30, 1961, DFS, Exp. 12-9-61, Leg. 8, Hoja 39, AGN.

New York.³⁴ Peruvian activist Hilda Gadea, Che Guevara's ex-wife, worked for a magazine published by Prensa Latina called *Latin American Economic Panorama*. Mexican journalist Armando Rodríguez Suárez served as a coordinator of the news agency first in Cuba and then in Mexico.³⁵ The international character of Prensa Latina's leadership supported the news agency's claims that it was more than just a Cuban propaganda machine.

The first director of Prensa Latina, Jorge Masetti, lent significant international prestige to the news agency. The Argentine journalist had travelled to Cuba in 1958 to interview Fidel and Che in the Sierra Maestra. He accepted Che's invitation to return to Cuba for "Operation Truth" in 1959 and remained on the island to help launch Prensa Latina. Masetti's experience working in a similar organization—Juan Domingo Perón's Agencia Latina—made him the perfect person to run Castro's wire service.³⁶ According to one of the agency's publications, Masetti recruited such illustrious intellectuals as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, C. Wright Mills, and Gabriel García Márquez as

³⁴ "Prensa Latina: Al servicio de la verdad--Antecedentes."

³⁵ "Prensa Latina informe."

³⁶ Gabriel Rot, *Los orígenes perdidos de la guerrilla en la Argentina: La historia de Jorge Ricardo Masetti y el Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Cielo por Asolto, 2000), 24. Che Guevara had also worked for Agencia Latina during his time in Mexico. See Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 158.

collaborators.³⁷ Masetti worked as the general director of Prensa Latina until 1961, when he resigned in order to dedicate his full attention to revolutionary activities.³⁸

Jorge Masetti's career after leaving the news agency illustrates the connections between Prensa Latina and violent revolution. In early 1961, he began working full-time for Cuba's General Intelligence Department, or DGI.³⁹ Masetti travelled to Africa soon afterward, bearing a message from Castro offering aid to the rebel leaders of the Algerian National Liberation Front. They accepted, and the Argentine journalist supervised the delivery of a shipload of weapons from Cuba—the first military aid that Castro sent to Africa. Masetti used his time in Africa to gain training in urban guerrilla warfare, which he intended to put to use in his home country.⁴⁰ In 1963, he returned to Argentina with Che's blessing and became "Comandante Segundo," the leader of the People's Guerilla Army operating in the northern province of Salta. Unfortunately for the aspiring revolutionary, his small guerrilla *foco* was no match for the Salta rural police.⁴¹ The first director of Prensa Latina died in April 1964, his uprising a complete failure.

³⁷ "Prensa Latina: Al servicio de la verdad--Antecedentes." Sartre and de Beauvoir both attended the funeral rally in Havana in 1960 after the explosion of the French freighter *Le Coubre* in Havana's harbor killed dozens of people. This was the rally where a photographer captured the shot that immortalized Che's image and Castro introduced the slogan "Patria ó muerte." Gabriella Paolucci, "Sartre's Humanism and the Cuban Revolution," *Theory and Society* 36, no. 3 (May 2007): 245-263; Fidel Castro Ruz, "Speech on the Revolution Will Not Stop," March 7, 1960, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600307.html>.

³⁸ It is also possible that Masetti resigned out of frustration with the increasingly large role that the Cuban communist party was assuming in the direction of Prensa Latina, as his son, also named Jorge Ricardo Masetti, later recounted. Jorge Masetti, *In the Pirate's Den: My Life as a Secret Agent for Castro* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 9. On the question of Masetti's motivations for resigning, see also Rot, *Los orígenes perdidos de la guerrilla en la Argentina*, 61-65.

³⁹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 31. On the DGI and Cuba's export of revolution, see Jonathan Brown, "The Duty of the Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution," unpubl. ms., 2011.

⁴⁰ "Prensa Latina: Al servicio de la verdad—Antecedentes," Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 52; Rot, *Los orígenes perdidos de la guerrilla en la Argentina*, 84.

⁴¹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 101. Masetti used the title "Comandante Segundo" because Che Guevara was supposed to join the group and become "Comandante Primero." Rot, *Los orígenes perdidos*

According to Mexican intelligence agents, Jorge Masetti was not the only employee of Prensa Latina involved in clandestine activities. Reports about the news agency's ties to subversion, propaganda, and even armed revolution abounded. For example, the director of the Department of Federal Security claimed that the head of the Mexican office of Prensa Latina, Edmundo Jardón Arzate, controlled a radio station at the National Autonomous University. An intelligence report described the radio's director as a communist who was trying to prepare acts of sabotage to disrupt Kennedy's visit to Mexico. Furthermore, the head of intelligence asserted that employees of Prensa Latina were directing a smear campaign against the federal government, agitating the public on behalf of political prisoners.⁴²

Mexican government officials worried that Prensa Latina was a cover for the Cuban government's intelligence collection. Security agents monitored the telegrams that the wire service sent from Mexico to Cuba about such politically sensitive topics as meetings between heads of state, arrests of protestors, and student activism.⁴³ An in-depth intelligence report about the organization composed in November 1968 began: "Prensa

de la guerrilla en la Argentina, 100. On Masetti's guerrilla expedition in Argentina, see also Daniel Jacinto Avalos, *La guerrilla del Che y Masetti en Salta - 1964: Ideología y mito en el Ejército Guerrillero del Pueblo*, 2nd ed. (Salta: Ediciones Política y Cultura, 2005); Brown, "The Duty of the Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution."

⁴² Rangel Escamilla, "Investigación acerca de la agencia noticiosa 'Prensa Latina'."

⁴³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Prensa Latina sending information to Cuba]," October 24, 1960, DFS, Exp 65-92-60, Leg. 1, Hoja 6, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Prensa Latina sending information about Latin America to Cuba]," July 19, 1961, DFS, Exp 65-92-61, Leg. 1, Hoja 234, AGN. The CIA also monitored Prensa Latina's mail pouch and the correspondence. Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (New York: Stonehill Publishing Company, 1975), 531. Agee, a company man who operated in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s, eventually became disillusioned and published an exposé of the CIA. The agency confirmed the veracity of much of Agee's information in a classified book review. Anonymous, "Book review of 'Inside the Company: CIA Diary' by Philip Agee," *Studies in Intelligence* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 35-38.

Latina is not only a news agency but also an instrument of Castro's government, used to spread propaganda and undertake illicit political activities in foreign countries while at the same time dedicating itself to espionage and other clandestine missions."⁴⁴ The report went on to trace connections between Prensa Latina and Cuba's spy apparatus. A disaffected DGI agent confirmed in his memoirs that the intelligence organization had "virtually taken over" Prensa Latina.⁴⁵

Another Cuban refugee lent further credence to claims that the news agency was a cover for espionage operations. Pedro L. Roig, a former employee of Castro's Ministry of Foreign Relations in both Cuba and Mexico, claimed in his memoirs that the training school for the foreign services—including Prensa Latina—was actually a "school for spies."⁴⁶ He described the pivotal day during his own training when Comandante Manuel Piñeiro Losada, the head of Cuba's intelligence services, visited the training center and shared a state secret with Roig and the other students. "The truth," Piñeiro confided, "is that you will receive classes to graduate as officials of state security, officials of the glorious G2." According to Roig, many of his fellow students at the so-called spy school went on to join Prensa Latina's "extensive web of espionage."⁴⁷

Concerns about Cuban espionage prompted Mexican officials to try to curtail Prensa Latina's subversive activities. In March 1960, secret service agents raided the

⁴⁴ "Prensa Latina informe."

⁴⁵ Orlando Castro Hidalgo, *Spy for Fidel* (Miami, Fla: E. A. Seemann Pub, 1971), 106.

⁴⁶ Pedro L. Roig, *Como trabajan los espías de Castro: Como se infiltra el G2* (Miami: Duplex Paper Products of Miami, 1964), 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

agency's offices and interrogated the employees.⁴⁸ In August 1961, officials arrested a "very dangerous" member of Prensa Latina's staff for carrying weapons in the Mexico City airport.⁴⁹ Police detained a man carrying a Prensa Latina credential when they caught him painting "Viva Cuba" in lipstick on public walls immediately following the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁵⁰ A Costa Rican man who worked for the news agency accused agents in the Department of Federal Security of apprehending him illegally in front of Prensa Latina's offices in Mexico City. The officials reportedly took the foreigner to a hotel room where they tortured him and told him to confess to illicit activities like arms smuggling and organizing subversive movements. When the Costa Rican journalist refused, the department of immigration deported him.⁵¹ Despite officials' continued suspicions about the news agency, however, the government never shut down the Mexican branch office of Prensa Latina.

The leaders of other Latin American countries showed less lenience. The governments of Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua banned Prensa Latina. General Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes of Guatemala, accusing Prensa Latina of following a "Marxist ideology" and publishing stories that embarrassed the government, canceled the wire service's permission to operate in his country.⁵² Prensa Latina had to close its offices in Peru and Argentina at the end of 1960, Venezuela in 1961, and in other

⁴⁸ Francisco Tapia Navarro Agente 83 and Ismael Arciniega Rivera Agente, "Informe sobre la revista 'Prensa Latina,'" March 28, 1960, DFS, Exp 65-92-60, Leg. 1, Hoja 1, AGN.

⁴⁹ "[Prensa Latina employee arrested for carrying weapons in Mexico City airport]."

⁵⁰ "[Prensa Latina employee detained]," November 3, 1962, DFS, Exp 65-92-62, Leg. 2, Hoja 153, AGN.

⁵¹ "Atormentado y deportado," *Política*, September 15, 1963.

⁵² "Un Año de 'Prensa Latina'."

countries across the hemisphere.⁵³ Frequently, the eviction of the news agency coincided with the host governments' severance of diplomatic relations with Cuba.

As both Prensa Latina and its parent country became increasingly isolated in the Americas, their ties to Mexico became ever more important. Mexico City was a central point of communication between Prensa Latina's main offices in Havana and its employees spread across the rest of the hemisphere. Intelligence agents claimed that communist leaders in Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Chile used the Mexican offices of the wire service to transmit their correspondence with Cuba. Revolutionaries in the Dominican Republic and Peru also sent messages to Havana via Mexico.⁵⁴

Confessions from Prensa Latina's employees led to further questions about the wire service's true activities. In August 1968, the accountant and general administrator for the news agency in Mexico told intelligence agents that he had been transmitting "mysterious" messages for Hilda Gadea through Prensa Latina offices for more than five years.⁵⁵ His professions of loyalty to the Mexican government and ignorance about the contents of the messages did little to impress his interrogators. They suspected that he had been involved in recruiting Mexican citizens to aid Che Guevara's guerrilla activities in Bolivia.⁵⁶

⁵³ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[Prensa Latina offices closed for serving Soviet interests]," December 29, 1960, DFS, Exp 65-91-60, Leg. 1, Hoja 15, AGN; "Prensa Latina: Al servicio de la verdad—Antecedentes;" Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, 269.

⁵⁴ "Prensa Latina informe."

⁵⁵ Cap. Luis De la Barrera Moreno, "[Prensa Latina employee's confessions]," August 11, 1968, DFS, Exp 65-92-68, Leg. 3, Hoja 97, AGN.

⁵⁶ "Prensa Latina informe." No Mexicans actually joined Che's Bolivian venture, which ended with the revolutionary's death in October 1967.

Other employees of Prensa Latina may well have been even more involved in revolutionary movements. One of the founders of the news agency, Argentine journalist Jorge Timossi, published in-depth interviews with Venezuelan and Mexican guerrilla groups under the pseudonym “Augusto Velardo.”⁵⁷ He also covered the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic, the revolutions in Libya and Iran, and the overthrow of Allende in Chile. Mexican security agents were sure that Timossi was actually carrying out missions for Cuba’s intelligence agency when he visited with guerrilla groups for ostensibly journalistic purposes.⁵⁸

Prensa Latina was one of Fidel Castro’s most effective weapons in his war with the United States. It provided newspapers, magazines, and radio stations around the world with an alternative source of news, challenging U.S. and European control over information. In addition, the wire service operated as a propaganda machine. Favorable news about Cuba and negative portrayals of the United States emanated from Prensa Latina’s offices. Finally, the news agency was a handy cover for Cuban intelligence activities. The Mexican office of Prensa Latina, in particular, served as a crucial bridge between the wire service’s home in Havana and the rest of its affiliates throughout Latin America. In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, it became evident that Prensa Latina’s news network was just one of the many ways that Fidel Castro used Mexican territory as a base for subversive activities in the rest of the Americas.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; Augusto Velardo, “Genaro: Hechos no palabras,” *Por Qué?*, August 5, 1971.

⁵⁸ “Prensa Latina informe.”

EXPORT OF REVOLUTION

Mexico played a crucial role in Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's efforts to export revolution to the rest of Latin America. The latter's vision of continental revolution was highly formulaic and based largely on the belief that the Cuban experience could serve as a blueprint for other rebellions.⁵⁹ Just as they had used Mexican territory as a safe haven from which to launch their own crusade in 1956, Castro and his followers tried to use the same fertile ground to initiate revolutions in other countries. To an extent unrecognized in the historical literature, Cuban agents intervened in Mexico's internal affairs, contrary to Castro's public declarations of mutual respect.⁶⁰ Cuban revolutionary activities within Mexican territory revealed the true costs of maintaining diplomatic ties with Castro.

Shortly after Fidel Castro came into power, his representatives began to use Mexican territory to support revolutions against other governments of Latin America. In July 1960, Mexican intelligence agents reported that the Cuban embassy in Mexico was providing training and economic support to various groups of Nicaraguan political exiles who sought to overthrow the government of Anastasio Somoza. Diplomatic officials supported at least one failed incursion into Nicaragua. At the beginning of 1960, Pablo Agustín Aldama Acosta, Cuba's cultural attaché to Mexico, provided money, orientation, weapons, passports, and visas to a group of Nicaraguan revolutionaries that included a

⁵⁹ On Cuban theories regarding the export of revolution, see Matt D. Childs, "An Historical Critique of the Emergence and Evolution of Ernesto Che Guevara's Foco Theory," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 3 (October 1995): 593-624.

⁶⁰ Works on Mexican history that deny Cuban support for guerrillas in Mexico include Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); Sergio Aguayo, *1968: Los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998).

young Mexican student and an Argentine friend of Ernesto Guevara, also nicknamed “Che.”⁶¹

Central American dictators were among Castro’s chief targets. “The Cuban embassy in Mexico is in charge of directing the diverse movements throughout Latin America against the so-called Central American dictatorships,” Mexican intelligence agents contended.⁶² An employee of the Cuban embassy who defected in Mexico City accused the cultural attaché of providing arms and money to Dominican, Guatemalan, and Nicaraguan exiles.⁶³ The informant claimed that Pablo Agustín Aldama Acosta had made various trips across Mexico’s southern border in order to provide orientation and aid to Guatemalan exiles who were trying to overthrow their government. Earlier reports from the Department of Federal Security corroborated the defector’s declarations that Aldama Acosta was a Cuban intelligence agent involved in subversive activities.⁶⁴

Castro continued to use his connections with Mexico to foment revolution in Guatemala throughout the 1960s. According to CIA reports, members of the Cuban diplomatic staff in Mexico began providing assistance to the Guatemalan guerrilla movement as early as 1962.⁶⁵ The Cubans sent thousands of weapons through Mexican

⁶¹ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, “Actividades de asilados políticos nicaraguenses residentes en nuestro país que en forma constante tratan de efectuar una conjura en contra del gobierno actual de la república de Nicaragua que preside el Gral. Anastasio Somoza,” July 11, 1960, DFS, Exp 11-56-60, Leg 1, Hoja 123, AGN.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “[interview of a Cuban embassy official],” September 22, 1960, DFS, Exp 76-3-60, Leg. 1, Exp 229.

⁶⁴ “Representantes de los servicios de inteligencia de ciertos países, en México,” July 17, 1959, DFS, Exp 12-9-59, Leg 4, Hoja 105, AGN. “[revolutionary activities of Cuban embassy official],” April 6, 1960, DFS, Exp 76-3-960, Leg 1, Hoja 101, AGN.

⁶⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala,” September 20, 1968, National Security Files, Latin America--El Salvador and Guatemala, Box 54, LBJ Library.

territory to Guatemalan guerrillas.⁶⁶ In 1966, Mexican officials tried to staunch the flow of money and arms to Guatemala by declaring the Cuban press attaché *persona non-grata*.⁶⁷ Later, CIA documents suggested that Cuba's embassy in Mexico remained an important supply depot for the Guatemalan rebels (see Image 5.1). One guerrilla group in particular—the Revolutionary Armed Forces, or FAR—reportedly received up to \$15,000 per month through this channel.⁶⁸

Guatemala and Nicaragua were only two of the many destinations for Castro's revolutionary exports; Mexico was the clearinghouse, the central link in the chain. U.S. embassy officials described Mexico as “a major overseas base for Castroist subversion and terrorism in the other Latin American countries.”⁶⁹ They reasoned that the severance of diplomatic relations between Cuba and Mexico would deny Castro one of his most important channels for subversion in Latin America.

Members of Cuba's own intelligence services confessed that Mexico played a crucial role as a base for exporting revolution throughout Latin America. Disaffected Cuban embassy employee Pedro L. Roig depicted the Cuban embassy in Mexico as both a “trampoline” for the distribution of tons of communist propaganda and as the center point of a vast web of espionage, arms trafficking, and contraband.⁷⁰ Another former

⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, “Guatemala--A Current Appraisal,” October 8, 1966, National Security Files, Latin America--El Salvador and Guatemala, Box 54, LBJ Library.

⁶⁷ Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #430, “[deterioration of relations between Cuba and Mexico],” November 16, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN; Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #430, “[U.S. press coverage of communism in Mexico],” December 1, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

⁶⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala.”

⁶⁹ U.S. Embassy--Mexico, “Effect in Mexico of Severance of Mexican-Cuban Relations,” June 8, 1964, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 1, U.S. National Archives.

⁷⁰ Roig, *Como trabajan los espías de Castro*, 64, 72.

Cuban intelligence agent who had operated in Paris seconded Roig's claims that Cuban diplomats in Mexico supported clandestine operations throughout Latin America.⁷¹ A third, who had escaped and sought asylum in Canada, described Mexico as the base of operations for other regions of Latin America and the "route through which everything moves between Cuba and the rest of the continent."⁷²

However, Mexico was not just a transit point—it was also the final destination for many subversive Cubans and their tools of the trade. One of the ways that Castro's emissaries most frequently tried to influence political life in Mexico was by distributing propaganda. The Cuban embassy in Mexico and the consulates in Mérida, Tampico, and Veracruz produced news bulletins such as the *Bulletin of the Cuban Embassy* and the *Informative Bulletin of the Cuban Consulate in Mérida*.⁷³ They gave out magazines published in Havana like *Bohemia*. They held screenings of movies produced in Cuba and in the socialist countries of Europe.⁷⁴ The "José Martí" Mexican-Cuban Institute of Cultural Relations housed a bookstore, news library, music store, and film club.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Castro Hidalgo, *Spy for Fidel*, 104.

⁷² "Dirección General de Inteligencia," May 1966, SPR—540—BIS5, SRE.

⁷³ General Francisco Ramirez Palacios, "[Cuban propaganda]," February 7, 1962, IPS Caja 1456 A, AGN; Joaquin Morales Solis, "[Cuban propaganda]," May 2, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[investigation of Cuban consul in Yucatán]," April 27, 1962, DFS, Exp 12-9-962, Leg 11, Hoja 241, AGN; Oscar Treviño Ríos, "Se informa y se solicita su intervención," March 14, 1962, Leg. III—2873—24, SRE.

⁷⁴ "[activities of Cuban consuls]," n.d., IPS Caja 2958 D, AGN.

⁷⁵ "El Instituto Mexicano-Cubano de Relaciones Culturales 'José Martí,'" *Boletín de Información de la Embajada de Cuba*, September 1961.

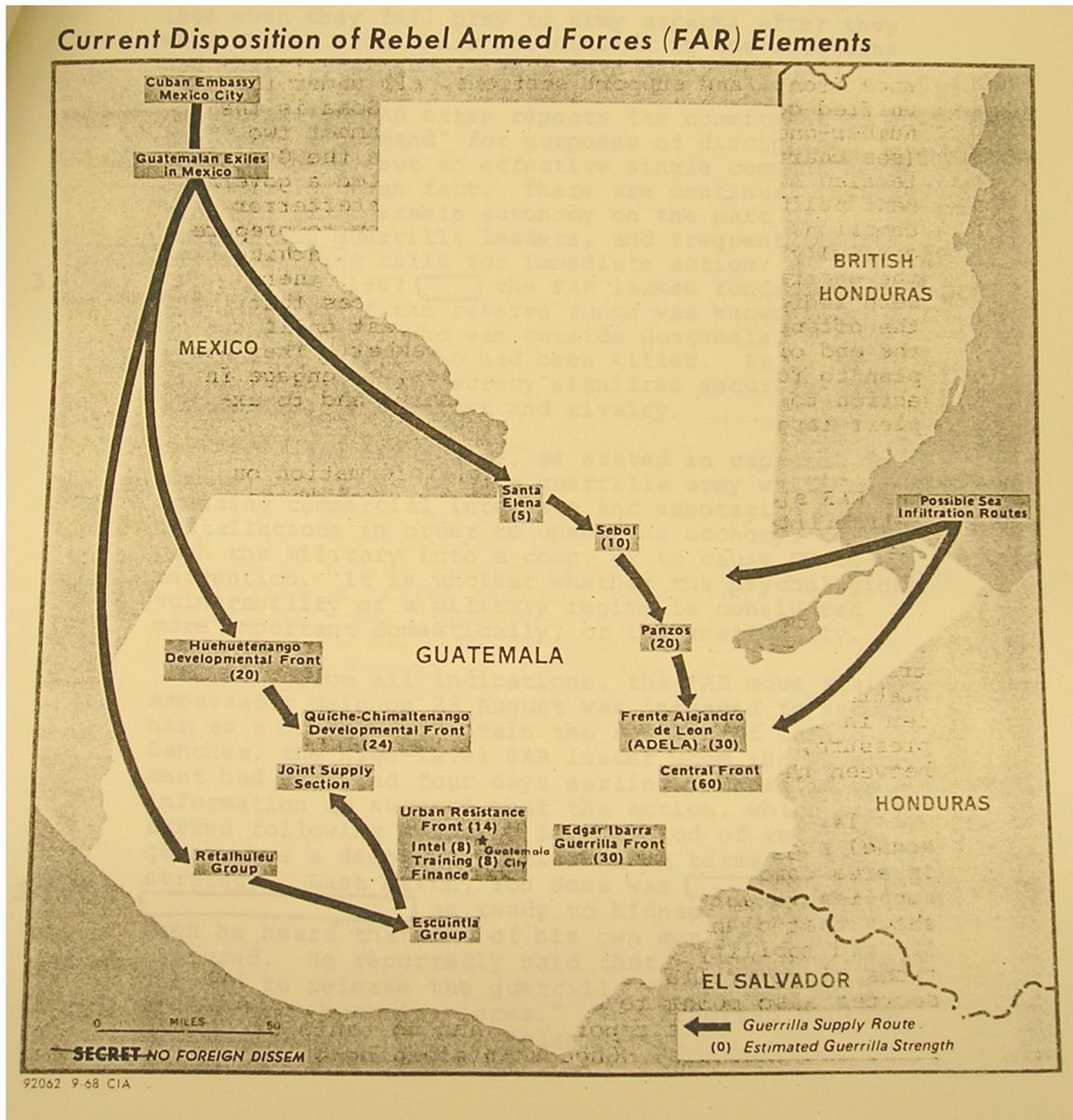


Image 5.1: 1968 CIA Map of guerrilla supply routes that highlights the importance of Cuba's embassy in Mexico as an agent provocateur. Source: Central Intelligence Agency, "The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala"(National Security Files, Latin America--El Salvador and Guatemala, Box 54, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, September 20, 1968).

The content of the publications that Cubans distributed in Mexico at times contained a clear political agenda. One bulletin from Mérida included a letter from a young woman in Havana. “In spite of all the calumnies and lies, victory will be ours because fighting for socialism is fighting for a great step forward in the history of humanity,” she boasted.⁷⁶ Describing how Cuba had gone from a bourgeois state that represented an exploitative minority to a nation governed by the common people, the author of the letter painted a rosy picture of her country’s socialist revolution. Such publications not only promoted Cuba but also advertised non-capitalist forms of government.

Sometimes Mexican officials even helped distribute Cuban propaganda. In March 1961, the Mexican ambassador to Cuba forwarded samples of a pamphlet from the National Railroad Federation of Cuba to the Mexican Railroad Syndicate.⁷⁷ The publication, a little booklet titled *Workers, Syndicates, and Production*, advertised itself as “an orientation guide to the principles of combat organizations.”⁷⁸ It exhorted railroad workers to band together to fight against the oppression of national and foreign capitalism. It is particularly surprising that Mexico’s foreign ministry helped distribute this piece of Cuban propaganda to the same group of workers—railroad operators—who had staged such disruptive protests in recent years.⁷⁹ This suggests that even within

⁷⁶ Estrella Rubio Bernal, “La revolución socialista y los estudiantes,” *Boletín informativo del consulado de Cuba en Mérida*, November 23, 1961.

⁷⁷ Gilberto Bosques, “Se remiten folletos,” March 2, 1961, Leg. III—2522—19, SRE.

⁷⁸ *Los trabajadores, los sindicatos, y la producción* (Havana: Comisión Nacional de Cultura y Propaganda de la Federación Nacional Ferroviaria de Cuba, 1960), 3.

⁷⁹ On activism among railroad workers, see Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation.

Mexico's authoritarian government, specific bureaucracies sometimes departed from the president's official program.

The Cuban government reached out to Mexican railroad workers in other ways as well. In July 1960, at least two train operators from Mexico attended the Latin American Youth Congress in Havana.⁸⁰ That same year, the Cuban air attaché confessed to Mexican security officials that his government provided propaganda to railroad workers.⁸¹ In 1961, the head of intelligence reported that the Cuban embassy was using its connections with the Popular Socialist Party to provide passage to Havana for some train operators fired in the protests of 1958-1959.⁸² Perhaps the Cubans were trying to revive Mexico's failed railroad movement, or maybe they believed that their indoctrination efforts would be particularly effective among an audience already familiar with organized activism.

Cuban officials contributed in yet another way to the circulation of "subversive" propaganda by providing financial support to the opposition press. Mexican intelligence agents contended that Cuba subsidized Mexico's premier leftist magazine, *Política*, as well as the Communist Party's organ, *La Voz de México*.⁸³ Rumors swirled that Castro's embassy was financing a "communist" newspaper in the state of Guerrero titled *The*

⁸⁰ "Procuraduria: Por haber ido a Cuba?," *Política*, November 1, 1960.

⁸¹ "[interview of a Cuban embassy official]."

⁸² Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[PPS working with Cuban embassy]," July 29, 1961, DFS, Exp 11-2-61, Leg. 9, Hoja 62, AGN.

⁸³ "Revista 'Política,'" October 24, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-109-1966, Leg. 1, Hoja 158, AGN; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[Cuban support of PCM newspaper]," May 8, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-4-67, Leg. 19, Hoja 170, AGN.

Insurgent.⁸⁴ Intelligence agents attributed directorship of the newspaper to Genaro Vázquez Rojas, the man who had led a successful protest movement against the governor of Guerrero and later became head of a guerrilla group.⁸⁵ By providing money to the opposition press, the Cubans were subtly intervening in Mexico's internal politics.

The Cuban embassy also interfered in Mexico's domestic politics by supporting left-wing organizations. It provided funding to Lázaro Cárdenas's National Liberation Movement, as well as the Communist Party.⁸⁶ Cuban consulates distributed money and propaganda to communist groups in the provinces.⁸⁷ In 1968, the organizer of a student protest march claimed that he had received thousands of dollars from the Cuban embassy.⁸⁸ Much of the money that the Cubans gave to leftist groups undoubtedly went to supporting pro-Castro activities, but some of it likely also helped fund demonstrations and other means of criticism directed at the state.

Even more provocative, the Cuban government provided guerrilla training to Mexican citizens. Revolutionaries from around the world travelled to the island to receive

⁸⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "[communist propaganda in Guerrero]," March 2, 1962, DFS, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Leg. 2, Hoja 320, AGN.

⁸⁵ On Genaro Vázquez Rojas, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

⁸⁶ "Castro's Subversive Capabilities in Latin America," November 9, 1962, National Security Files, National Intelligence Estimates, Box 9, LBJ Library; "Declaraciones de Pedro L. Roig," June 12, 1962, IPS Caja 1456-A, Exp. 1, Hoja 56, AGN; "[PCM summary]," March 30, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-4-65, Leg. 13, Hoja 190, AGN; "Dirección General de Inteligencia;" Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[PCM receiving money from Russian and Cuban embassies]," December 11, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-4-67, Leg. 22, Hoja 150, AGN; "Se amplía la información del cubano JULIO GARCIA ESPINOSA quien entregó 85 mil pesos a elementos del PCM," n.d., IPS Caja 2958 A, AGN.

⁸⁷ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[PCM members in Veracruz receiving money from Cuban Consulate]," July 22, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-4-67, Leg. 20, Hoja 306, AGN.

⁸⁸ "La embajada de Cuba y la marcha estudiantil por la Ruta de la Libertad," n.d., IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN; "La embajada de Cuba y la marcha estudiantil por la Ruta de la Libertad," February 2, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

instruction in the arts of insurgency and guerrilla warfare. According to a former member of Cuba's intelligence department, in the early 1960s as many as 1,500 men and women matriculated through the guerrilla schools every year.⁸⁹ In May 1966, Mexico's ambassador in Havana sent a report to the Foreign Ministry with a list of nine Mexicans who were about to return to the country after having received guerrilla training in Cuba.⁹⁰ Eight others were to remain on the island for additional instruction. Later that year, the head of the Mexican Communist Party announced plans to send six members to Cuba for guerrilla training.⁹¹ A general intelligence summary composed in 1968 mentioned that a Mexican couple had spent time on the island receiving instruction in so-called revolutionary work. "Mexico is not exempt from Castro's goals to provoke disorder," the author of the report maintained.⁹²

The intelligence agent was right: despite Castro's public declarations to the contrary, he and his followers did not entirely spare Mexico from their efforts to export revolution. Employees of Cuba's embassies and consulates disseminated communist ideas through publications, films, and meetings. They discussed politics with members of leftist organizations and invited students to visit the island. Guerrilla schools in Cuba provided training to Mexican nationals. Mexico was not among Castro's primary targets for revolution, but neither was it entirely exempt from the web of subversion that spread outward from the neighboring island. This fact became ever more apparent throughout

⁸⁹ Castro Hidalgo, *Spy for Fidel*, 94.

⁹⁰ "Dirección General de Inteligencia."

⁹¹ "[PCM response to guerrilla training in Cuba]," December 6, 1966, DFS, Exp 11-4-66, Leg. 17, Hoja 436, AGN.

⁹² "Informe general sobre Cuba," May 20, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 D, AGN.

the 1960's, especially when Castro played host to an international conference promoting revolution.

THE TRICONTINENTAL CONFERENCE

A major component of Cuba's foreign policy in the 1960s was hosting international conferences, one of the largest and most important of which was the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, or the Tricontinental Conference. Almost a thousand people from around the world convened in Havana in January 1966 in order to, as they put it, coordinate their efforts to fight imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. They exchanged ideas and strengthened ties across political, cultural, and geographic lines. Unlike previous international gatherings such as Lázaro Cárdenas's 1961 Latin American Peace Conference, the Tricontinental promoted an explicitly violent program of action. This shift in policy, spearheaded by Castro, provoked an increase in counter-revolutionary efforts across the Americas on the part of military officials.

The Tricontinental Conference grew out of a solidarity movement among groups pursuing decolonization in Asia and Africa. Previous conferences in Bandung, Indonesia (1955 and 1961); Cairo, Egypt (1957-1958 and 1964); Conakry, Guinea (1962); Moshi, Tanzania (1963); and Winneba, Ghana (1965) laid the groundwork for transnational cooperation by establishing the Organization for the Solidarity of the Afro-Asian Peoples. Latin American observers—Cubans, to be precise—began attending the Afro-Asian solidarity meetings in 1961. At the end of that year, the executive committee of the Organization for the Solidarity of the Afro-Asian Peoples resolved to begin preparing a

conference that would officially incorporate the people of Latin America. In 1963, Fidel Castro extended an invitation to host such a gathering.⁹³

There were also Latin American precedents for the Tricontinental Conference. Lázaro Cárdenas's 1961 Latin American Peace Conference had brought together delegates from across the continent and observers from around the world in the name of national sovereignty, economic emancipation, and peace. The promotional materials of the Tricontinental Conference recognized this Mexican contribution, proclaiming that the Latin American Peace Conference had "fostered conditions" for the 1966 meeting.⁹⁴ The World Peace Council, the organization that had sponsored the earlier gathering, sent a delegation to observe the Tricontinental Conference.⁹⁵ Some of the same people attended both events but Cárdenas, the star of the earlier conference, did not.⁹⁶

Even without Cárdenas, the Tricontinental Conference managed to attract an impressive number of people. It was, according to one historian, the "largest assembly of Third World militants and supporters that the world had ever known."⁹⁷ According to the organizers, more than five hundred delegates from eighty-two countries attended, along with sixty-four observers and seventy-seven guests. One hundred and twenty-nine

⁹³ General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Havana, 1966), 10-17.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁹⁶ "Cárdenas y la Conferencia Tricontinental," *Política*, December 15, 1965.

⁹⁷ Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro*, 186. On the unique size and breadth of the conference, see also Luis V. Manrara, *The Tricontinental Conference: A Declaration of War* (Miami: The Truth About Cuba Committee, 1966); OAS Special Consultative Committee on Security, *The "First Tricontinental Conference," Another Threat to the Security of the Inter-American System* (Organization of American States, 1966).

members of the foreign press from thirty-eight countries provided coverage.⁹⁸ Each of the three continents had about the same number of representatives, which in theory provided equal representation. The Latin American countries with the biggest delegations were Cuba (41 members), Venezuela (15), and Chile (9).⁹⁹ Among the most famous Latin American leaders in attendance, besides Castro, were Salvador Allende of Chile and Luis Augusto Turcios Lima, a guerrilla leader from Guatemala.

Other well-known leaders expressed solidarity through letters of adherence rather than personal attendance. President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt sent greetings and offered to host a subsequent tricontinental conference in Cairo. The heads of communist parties around the world—including those of the Soviet Union and China—declared their support for the gathering.¹⁰⁰ Greetings arrived from Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Zhou En-Lai of the People's Republic of China, Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union, Kim Il Sung of North Korea, Walter Ulbricht of the German Democratic Republic, and Sukarno of Indonesia.¹⁰¹

The effort to encourage international solidarity suffered as debates over the delegations at the Tricontinental Conference led to significant tensions among the organizers. Most of the delegations consisted of representatives of non-governmental organizations; the few that came as official or semiofficial representatives of governments were from Asia and Africa. As host of the conference, Castro insisted that

⁹⁸ General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 183.

⁹⁹ OAS Special Consultative Committee on Security, "The First Tricontinental Conference."

¹⁰⁰ "Unión de Tres Continentes," *Política*, January 15, 1966.

¹⁰¹ OAS Special Consultative Committee on Security, "The First Tricontinental Conference."

he decide which organizations within each country would send representatives.¹⁰² In so doing, he gave more power and authority to some groups than to others.

Castro's insistence upon his prerogative to choose delegations underscored the friction among various revolutionary movements both within and outside Latin America. At this time, the Soviets, Chinese, and Cubans were fiercely competing for leadership of the so-called worldwide revolutionary movement. The Soviets were promoting peaceful coexistence with the United States and many Latin American governments, the Chinese were advocating armed struggle in the form of "people's wars," and the Cubans were pushing for the formation of guerrilla movements based on their "foco theory."¹⁰³ Within Latin America, different groups either aligned themselves with one of the major communist powers or Cuba, or forged their own paths. By seizing control over the invitations to the Tricontinental Conference and only inviting certain groups, Castro made significant gains in promoting the Cuban program for revolution in Latin America.

The Mexican delegation illustrated Castro's policy of limiting conference participation to his cronies. Castro put a relatively new organization—the National Liberation Movement—in charge of the delegation, instead of choosing the only Marxist party recognized by the Mexican government, the Popular Socialist Party, or the main group aligned with the Soviet Union, the Mexican Communist Party. According to one

¹⁰² Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro*, 188.

¹⁰³ On the conflict between Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban revolutionary efforts in Latin America, see Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 34-35; Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro*, 189; Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, 67-72; Cole Blasier, "The Soviet Union in the Cuban-American Conflict," in *Cuba in the World*, ed. Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 37-52, 39; William E. Ratliff, *Castroism and Communism in Latin America, 1959-1976: The Varieties of Marxist-Leninist Experience* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1976). On the Chinese concept of "people's war," see Cecil Johnson, *Communist China & Latin America, 1959-1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 53-128

observer, this decision fed into the competition between the three organizations for leadership of Mexico's left wing.¹⁰⁴

Castro had multiple reasons for favoring the National Liberation Movement. First, the organization had emerged from Lázaro Cárdenas's 1961 Latin American Peace Conference and to a large extent embodied the *cardenista* current in Mexican politics. Castro admired Cárdenas and owed part of his own success to the ex-president's efforts on his behalf. Comments made by one of the Tricontinental Conference's organizers suggested that Lázaro Cárdenas had a hand in the preparations for the gathering, so it is also possible that the ex-president chose the Mexican delegation.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the National Liberation Movement was an umbrella organization with ties to numerous revolutionary and reformist groups within Mexico. By inviting representatives of the liberation movement, Castro could reach multiple audiences. In fact, the committee that prepared the Mexican delegation's materials included not only members of the National Liberation Movement, but also representatives from the Mexican Communist Party, the People's Electoral Front, the Independent Campesino Center, and other organizations and workers' groups.¹⁰⁶

The head of the Mexican delegation was a man whose role in Mexican politics was soon to increase dramatically: Heberto Castillo Martínez. One of the founding members of the National Liberation Movement, Castillo had led the organization's committee for the defense of Cuba before gaining control of the entire movement in

¹⁰⁴ "Liberación Nacional' quiere dirigir la agitación y riñe con el PPS y con el PCM: La pugna que se inició en la Tricontinental está debilitando la 'Semana del Vietcong,'" *El Sol de México*, March 17, 1966.

¹⁰⁵ "Saludo al pueblo de México y declaraciones de Yousef Elsebai, secretario general del comite internacional preparatorio de la conferencia," *Política*, January 1, 1966.

¹⁰⁶ "México en la Tricontinental," *Política*, December 15, 1965.

1965. According to the director of intelligence in the Department of Federal Security, Fidel Castro paid Heberto Castillo to travel around Latin America promoting the Tricontinental Conference in the fall of 1965.¹⁰⁷ Security agents became even more concerned with Castillo's actions after the conference, especially when he started playing a lead role in the 1968 student movement.¹⁰⁸

Heberto Castillo Martínez's statements at the Tricontinental Conference gave the Mexican government cause for concern. Castillo declared that the National Liberation Movement operated under the principle that "only through the struggle for liberation can a contribution be made to that peace with dignity that... requires in most cases a liberating war." He also asserted that imperialism could be defeated only "with weapons in hand." Castillo made it clear that this liberating war with weapons in hand needed to be fought across the Americas, including in Mexico. He denounced the Alliance for Progress and declared that the Mexican Revolution's program of agrarian reform had been betrayed and distorted since Cárdenas's departure from office. Castillo swore that the Mexicans were ready to undertake a fight to the death to free their country from American imperialism.¹⁰⁹

Strident as it was, Heberto Castillo Martínez's speech was not the most heated of the Tricontinental Conference. Far from it. Fidel Castro delivered the closing address to the gathering, in which he declared that for the Cuban revolutionaries, the battlefield against U.S. imperialism spanned the entire globe. He promised that revolutionary

¹⁰⁷ Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, "[MLN support of Tricontinental Conference in Havana]," November 5, 1965, DFS, Exp 11-6-65, Leg. 15, Hoja 211, AGN.

¹⁰⁸ On Heberto Castillo's involvement in the student movement, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁹ "Discursos de los jefes de las delegaciones a la Conferencia Tricontinental: México," *Política*, February 15, 1966.

movements in any corner of the world could count on Cuban manpower. Castro also called for a common and simultaneous struggle throughout all of Latin America and specified that in “all or almost all” countries the struggle would take on violent forms (see Image 5.2).¹¹⁰ His words broadcasted the increasingly internationalist thrust of Cuban foreign policy.¹¹¹

Another Communist leader rashly pledged his government’s support for revolutionary movements around the world. Sharaf R. Rashidov, the head of the Soviet delegation and first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, declared that “the Soviet people always support popular wars of liberation and the armed struggle of oppressed peoples and provide them with every kind of aid.”¹¹² He also expressed solidarity with revolutionaries in Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, and Guatemala.¹¹³ U.S. journalists speculated that Rashidov’s statement was an impulsive attempt to outflank the Chinese.¹¹⁴ Attendees of the conference enthusiastically applauded his pledge, while U.S. intelligence agents gloated that it gave them “perfect ammunition” for their propaganda

¹¹⁰ General Secretariat of the OSPAAAL, *First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America*.

¹¹¹ On internationalism in Cuban foreign policy, see Anthony T. Bryan, “Cuba’s Impact in the Caribbean,” *International Journal* 40, no. 2 (April 1, 1985): 331-347; Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*; Roberto F. Lamberg, “La formación de la línea castrista desde la Conferencia Tricontinental,” *Foro Internacional* 8, no. 3 (31) (January 1, 1968): 278-301; Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*. Paul J. Dosal argues that Che Guevara had long been an internationalist, but that the Tricontinental Conference was the point when Castro pushed ahead with Che’s plan to form an international fighting front. Dosal, *Comandante Che: Guerrilla Soldier, Commander, and Strategist, 1956-1967*, 214.

¹¹² “Unión de Tres Continentes.”

¹¹³ John W. Finney, “O.A.S. Condemns Havana Meeting: Denounces Move for Wars of ‘Liberation’ in Americas,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1966.

¹¹⁴ Richard Eder, “Moscow Softens View on Revolts: Disclaimers of Stand Taken at Cuban Parley Reported,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1966.



Image 5.2: An advertisement for the Tricontinental Conference, showing a bearded revolutionary, or “barbudo,” with weapon in hand. Source: *Política* (Mexico City, January 1, 1966).

operations against the gathering.¹¹⁵

Rashidov's speech reflected the Soviet Union's ambivalent approach to the Tricontinental Conference and to communist revolution in Latin America. On one hand, the Soviets favored the creation of a tricontinental revolutionary organization, hoping that it would dilute the heavy influence that the Chinese had enjoyed in the earlier Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization.¹¹⁶ The Soviet delegate was the one who proposed that the conference attendees establish what became the Solidarity Organization of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia, y América Latina, or OSPAAAL).¹¹⁷ On the other hand, the conference's declaration of war against so-called neocolonial regimes contradicted the Soviet Union's attempts to establish friendly relations with many Latin American governments. And Castro and Rashidov's pledges to support wars of liberation around the world implicitly and explicitly required Soviet financial commitments.

The Tricontinental Conference's resolutions challenged the Soviet Union's official policy of peaceful coexistence and favored the opposing Chinese and Cuban programs of violent confrontation. The general declaration expounded upon the need for national liberation and social revolution as part of a "war to the death" against "the colonialist, neocolonialist, and imperialist system of oppression and exploitation." It proclaimed the right of all peoples to resort to "all forms of struggle that may be necessary, including armed struggle," in pursuit of independence. The conference attendees proclaimed solidarity with armed struggles in Venezuela, Guatemala, Peru,

¹¹⁵ Agee, *Inside the Company*, 464.

¹¹⁶ Halperin, *The Taming of Fidel Castro*, 190.

¹¹⁷ "Unión de Tres Continentes."

Portuguese Guinea, Mozambique, Angola, and the Congo. They claimed that the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America had the right to answer imperialist violence with revolutionary violence.¹¹⁸

As if this public promotion of revolutionary violence were not enough, rumors swirled about secret plotting at the Tricontinental Conference. A week before the assembly began, agents from the Federal Judicial Police reported that Mexican communist leaders had formed a secret commission to send to Havana. Their mission supposedly was to receive orders in clandestine meetings outside of the spotlight of the conference. They would attend but not participate in the public events in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves.¹¹⁹ None of the official publications about the conference mentioned the presence of Mexican Communist Party members, but an article in *El Sol de México* claimed that the communists and the socialists had paid to send their own delegates to Havana, separate from the National Liberation Movement's official delegation. Heberto Castillo reportedly expelled the second secretary of the Mexican Communist Party, Manuel Terrazas, from the liberation movement for leading the non-official delegation.¹²⁰

There apparently were actually two Mexican delegations to the Tricontinental Conference. A little over a month after the end of the gathering, the head of the Popular Socialist Party, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, published an article defending the

¹¹⁸ "Primera Conferencia de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia, y América," *Política*, February 1, 1966.

¹¹⁹ Policía Judicial Federal, "[secret communist meetings planned at Tricontinental Conference]," December 28, 1965, GDO 202 (121), AGN.

¹²⁰ "Liberación Nacional quiere dirigir la agitación y riñe con el PPS y con el PCM: La pugna que se inició en la Tricontinental está debilitando la Semana del Vietcong."

Tricontinental Conference. In it, he claimed that a member of his party, Manuel Stephens Garcia, had been part of the Mexican delegation.¹²¹ Both men also took part in a large demonstration of support for the Tricontinental Conference held in Mexico City in early February. All the most important leftist organizations in Mexico took part in that demonstration—except the National Liberation Movement. Manuel Terrazas, the communist leader rumored to have attended the conference, and Manuel Stephens Garcia, the other “secret” attendee, were two of the three main speakers. Heberto Castillo Martínez, the head of the official delegation, was nowhere to be found.¹²² His absence suggests that there were two rival delegations, rather than one representative group as the conference organizers intended or one public and one secret commission as intelligence agents claimed.

Other secret meetings took place at the Tricontinental Conference. Mario Monje, the secretary-general of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Bolivia, later told journalist Jon Lee Anderson that “it was not the speeches that were being given [at the conference] that were important, but what was happening behind the scenes.”¹²³ Monje claimed that the Cubans used the gathering to establish contacts with the more radical groups in attendance, encouraging them to create new guerrilla *focos* in Latin America. Monje said that he pretended to support Cuban plans to start a violent insurrection in his country in

¹²¹ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “La Conferencia Tricontinental y la Revolución Mexicana,” in *Escritos sobre Cuba: Análisis de su proceso político, 1928-1967* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Sociales “Vicente Lombardo Toledano,” 2003), 433-437.

¹²² “La ‘Tri’ en México,” *Política*, February 15, 1966; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “Mitin del PCM y PPS en apoyo a las resoluciones de la Conferencia Tricontinental,” February 6, 1966, DFS, Versión Pública de Fidel Castro, Leg. 1, Hoja 121, AGN.

¹²³ Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 684. Monje helped prepare Che’s expedition in Bolivia before changing his mind and insisting that any armed insurgency in his country would have to be led by his own countrymen—not the Cubans or Che. After a disastrous meeting with Guevara, Monje eventually revoked his party’s support of Che’s efforts.

order to gain more attention from Castro and to out-maneuver the pro-Chinese Bolivian communist group.

The Cubans may indeed have conducted closed-door meetings with revolutionary groups at the Tricontinental Conference. They certainly made no secret of their desire to promote armed struggle throughout the Third World and especially in Latin America. The Havana-based organization that emerged from the conference, OSPAAAL, took a number of steps to enact the assembly's resolutions. In April of 1966, it began publishing the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, a monthly magazine with Spanish, English, French, and Arabic editions.¹²⁴ The magazine provided news about anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles throughout the world, in addition to practical guides to guerrilla warfare and armed insurrection.¹²⁵ Later that year, *The New York Times* reported that OSPAAAL had announced plans to open schools in Cuba and North Korea where "political cadres and guerrilla experts" would train personnel involved in national liberation movements.¹²⁶

The solidarity organization of Africa, Asia, and Latin America also published one of the most famous revolutionary documents of the decade: Che Guevara's "Message to the Tricontinental." The manifesto caused a sensation when it appeared in April 1967. In it, Guevara called for the initiation of a "worldwide conflagration... a total war... a constant and firm attack on all fronts." He claimed that liberation armies around the globe needed to create "two, three, or many Vietnams" in order to challenge the world system of imperialism. "Our soldiers must be... violent, selective, and cold killing machine[s]"

¹²⁴ "World Solidarity With the Tricontinental," *Tricontinental Bulletin*, April 1966.

¹²⁵ Carlos Marighella, "Minimanual del guerrillero urbano," *Revista Tricontinental*, 1970.

¹²⁶ "Cuba Reports Plans to Train Guerrillas," *New York Times*, November 20, 1966.

he wrote.¹²⁷ Che had composed this missive on the eve of his secret departure from Cuba in early November of 1966; by the time it was published in 1967, he was already in Bolivia, enacting his own call to arms.¹²⁸

The promotion of violent revolution during and following the Tricontinental Conference prompted a swift backlash. The United States, the main target of the anti-imperialist gathering, led the counterattack. According to ex-CIA agent Philip Agee, who was working in the Montevideo field office at the time, the U.S. government conducted a fierce media campaign against the Tricontinental conference. The headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency spent months preparing the propaganda and encouraged local stations to try to place agents in the delegations.¹²⁹

The CIA's media campaign focused on two themes—portraying the Tricontinental Conference as an instrument of Soviet subversion and convincing the public that it was dangerous enough to require political, diplomatic, and military countermeasures. Headlines in the *New York Times* blared “Help for Vietcong is Urged at Havana,” while the *Los Angeles Times* described the conference as a “hemispheric menace.”¹³⁰ When the Soviet delegate Rashidov made his impulsive declaration of support for armed insurgencies, Washington pushed for prominent display of his speech in newspapers across the hemisphere. CIA agents in countries that maintained relations

¹²⁷ Ernesto Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader: Writings by Ernesto Che Guevara on Guerrilla Strategy, Politics & Revolution* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997), 313.

¹²⁸ Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 718.

¹²⁹ Agee, *Inside the Company*, 463.

¹³⁰ “Help for Vietcong is Urged at Havana,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1966; “Hemispheric Menace,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1966.

with the Soviet Union made sure to provide government officials with copies of Rashidov's statement.¹³¹

The reaction to Rashidov's speech was so vehement that his fellow Soviet leaders had to backpedal. In Uruguay, the foreign minister summoned the Soviet ambassador and demanded an explanation for the USSR's participation in the Tricontinental Conference. The Venezuelan government issued a statement that it was going to examine its diplomatic relations with countries represented at the assembly.¹³² The Peruvian representative lodged a formal complaint with the Organization of American States, using Rashidov's declarations as evidence of Soviet intervention in Latin America.¹³³ All the Latin American members of the United Nations, except Mexico, filed a formal protest. In order to prevent further repercussions, representatives of the Soviet Union issued a public statement that Rashidov was speaking "privately" and not on behalf of the government.¹³⁴

The Soviets' retraction was not enough to appease the Organization of American States. All the members of the OAS except Mexico and Chile approved a resolution condemning the Tricontinental Conference.¹³⁵ The Special Consultative Committee on Security prepared a study about the Havana gathering, which they presented in April 1966. Describing the conference as "the most dangerous and serious threat that international communism has yet made against the inter-American system," the OAS

¹³¹ Agee, *Inside the Company*, 464.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 468.

¹³³ "Peru Asks OAS Council to Meet on Intervention," *New York Times*, January 22, 1966; "Peru Protests Soviet Support of Subversives," *Los Angeles Times*, January 25, 1966.

¹³⁴ "Most Latin Members of U.N. Protest on Havana Parley," *New York Times*, February 8, 1966; Eder, "Moscow Softens View on Revolts: Disclaimers of Stand Taken at Cuban Parley Reported."

¹³⁵ Finney, "O.A.S. Condemns Havana Meeting: Denounces Move for Wars of 'Liberation' in Americas."

committee contended that it was a declaration of war against democracy. The authors of the report observed that the conference was significant because it meant that the Cubans were no longer alone in their efforts to export revolution: now Russia had promised support to liberation movements around the world. “We are dealing with a war that is at the same time a revolution,” the OAS security committee declared, “and with a prolonged struggle for universal domination.”¹³⁶ They recommended that member states respond with a coordinated propaganda campaign in favor of democracy, as well as increased cooperation in security and intelligence activities. Later, Operation Condor would enact these plans for international military collaboration against subversives.¹³⁷

Some countries in the Organization of American States had already taken independent measures to counteract the effects of the Tricontinental Conference. Mexico’s premier newspaper, *Excélsior*, which usually followed the government’s lead, published a series of articles and editorials condemning the event and calling it a “meeting of hate.”¹³⁸ The provisional president of the Dominican Republic forbade the eight members of the Dominican delegation from returning home. Héctor García Godoy told reporters that the statements that the delegates made at the conference, including claims that the Dominican Republic could become the Vietnam of the Caribbean and accusations that he was a pawn of the United States, were enough to bar their return.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ OAS Special Consultative Committee on Security, “The First Tricontinental Conference.”

¹³⁷ On Operation Condor, see John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2004).

¹³⁸ Isaac M. Flores, “Quieren crear en Cuba un organismo para coordinar y apoyar actos subversivos,” *Excélsior*, January 9, 1966; “Junta del odio,” *Excélsior*, January 6, 1966, sec. Editorial; Isaac M. Flores, “Duros ataques a EU en la junta del odio,” *Excélsior*, January 5, 1966.

¹³⁹ “Dominican Leader Bars 8 Reds’ Return,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1966. The provisional Dominican president, Héctor García Godoy, had been installed after the United States invaded the

Two Japanese delegates were arrested twice on their way home—first in Lima and then in Rio de Janeiro—for carrying “subversive documents” pertaining to the Tricontinental Conference.¹⁴⁰

The Tricontinental Conference hurt the groups that it purported to aid by intensifying the climate of fear and suspicion and prompting increased repression on the part of government officials. In Chile, President Eduardo Frei Montalva blamed a series of strikes in the copper industry on subversive plans drawn up at the conference in Havana. When Fidel Castro gave a speech “violently attacking” the Frei administration on the eve of what was to be a major walkout, it apparently caused a nationalist backlash and contributed to the failure of the strike.¹⁴¹ In Mexico, the Tricontinental Conference provided fodder for the warnings of intelligence agents about communist agitation and leftist cooperation.¹⁴² The Minister of Agriculture blamed a student strike movement on the gathering.¹⁴³ The conference’s declarations about worldwide revolutions provided

Dominican Republic in 1965. Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson The United States and the World, 1963-69* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 180.

¹⁴⁰ “Jail and Persecution for the Tricontinental Delegates,” *Tricontinental Bulletin*, April 1966. Strict travel restrictions in many countries forced travelers to and from Cuba to take circuitous routes. The most common routes included stops in Mexico City, Paris, Moscow, Prague, Madrid, and Algiers. Castro Hidalgo, *Spy for Fidel*, 47, 94.

¹⁴¹ Juan de Onis, “Attack by Castro Proves Helpful to Frei in Chile: President Scores Over Reds as General Strike Fails,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1966. Though Frei was eager to condemn Castro in the press, he refrained from approving the OAS resolutions against the Tricontinental Conference. Salvador Allende’s political stature probably kept Frei from taking a stronger stand against the conference.

¹⁴² Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[FEP and PCM agitation following Tricontinental agreement],” February 2, 1967, DFS, Exp 11-141-67, Leg. 12, Hoja 222, AGN; Policia Judicial Federal and Agente #399, “[communist agitation following Tricontinental agreement],” July 6, 1966, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

¹⁴³ “Victoria estudiantil,” *Política*, July 15, 1967.

evidence for government officials' claims—and suspicions—that the 1968 Mexican student movement was part of an international communist conspiracy.¹⁴⁴

The most significant consequence of the Tricontinental Conference was that it provided governments across Latin America with an excuse for increased repression of opposition movements. Luis Turcios Lima, the Guatemalan guerrilla leader who had attended the Tricontinental Conference, died in a mysterious automobile accident ten months after the meeting in Havana. In 1967, Bolivian soldiers killed Che Guevara and routed his small force. By 1970, the Venezuelan guerrilla movement had lost momentum. Meanwhile, opposition groups in Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil began abandoning the Cuban formula and embracing urban guerrilla tactics.¹⁴⁵

The Tricontinental Conference also did little in the way of increasing revolutionary solidarity, either within or across national and continental borders. Instead of uniting anti-imperialist efforts around the world, the conference elevated the Cuban formula and did nothing to resolve the Sino-Soviet split. The organization created by the conference, OSPAAAL, maintains its offices in Havana to this day and continues to publish magazines and posters, but has not held another international conference on the scale of the 1966 Tricontinental gathering. In spite of all its fanfare and lofty ambitions, the Tricontinental Conference was to a large extent a failure.

¹⁴⁴ “Síntesis de antecedentes de 1966, 1967 del conflicto político y social conocido como movimiento estudiantil creado en el mes de julio de 1968,” 1968, IPS Caja 2181 A, AGN; Comité 68 Pro Libertadores Democráticas, *Los procesos de México 68: La criminalización de la víctimas: Genocidio y delitos de lesa humanidad, documentos básicos 1968-2008* (Mexico City: Comité 68 Pro Libertades Democráticas, 2008), 50; Luis Gutiérrez Oropeza, *Díaz Ordaz: el hombre, el gobernante* (Mexico City: Gustavo de Anda, 1988), 42; Heberto Castillo, “Los represores del 68,” *Proceso*, September 13, 1993.

¹⁴⁵ Enrique Ros, *Castro y las guerrillas en Latinoamérica* (Miami, Fla: Ediciones Universal, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The maintenance of diplomatic relations between Cuba and Mexico benefitted Fidel Castro in a number of ways. Symbolically, it gave him the opportunity to demonstrate that he could conduct a mutually respectful relationship with other heads of state. Castro claimed that if other governments, like that of Mexico, refrained from interfering in Cuba's internal affairs he would show the same restraint.

Mexico's continuing ties with Cuba also helped Castro improve his international image by enabling the operations of Prensa Latina. The Cuban wire service offered an alternative source and interpretation of current events to newspapers, magazines, and radio stations around the world. It competed with U.S. and European news agencies for control over information. The Mexican offices of Prensa Latina served as an essential link between the headquarters in Havana and the employees throughout the rest of Latin America, where other branch offices had closed shop.

In addition, the maintenance of relations between Mexico and Cuba facilitated Castro's efforts to export revolution to the rest of Latin America. People, money, propaganda, and weapons passed through Mexico on their way to and from Cuba. Contrary to Castro's public promises of non-intervention in Mexico's internal affairs, some of these revolutionary elements remained in Mexico. Furthermore, Cuban guerrilla schools provided subversive training to a number of Mexican citizens.

When Castro's early efforts to export the Cuban model of revolution failed, he tried to gain more allies by hosting the Tricontinental Conference. He hoped that the gathering would convince revolutionary groups around the world of the success of the Cuban formula. The plan backfired. The conference not only highlighted and exacerbated the differences among opposition groups competing for primacy, but it also provided an impetus and excuse for increased repression on the part of government authorities.

In spite of the facts that Castro included Mexican delegates in his revolutionary conference and his agents undertook subversive activities within Mexico, the diplomatic bridge between the two countries remained. The benefits of the relationship for Castro were clear; he needed a secure entry point to Latin America and used Mexico for this purpose. The domestic benefits for the Mexican government were less obvious but equally compelling. Though they distrusted and occasionally plotted against each other, Mexican and Cuban leaders could agree on one thing: maintaining diplomatic relations was worth the effort.

Chapter 6: The United States and Mexican-Cuban Relations

“President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz... asked that I reiterate to President Johnson that any time the chips are down, whenever faced with a life and death crisis, Mexico will be staunchly and unwaveringly on the side of the U.S.”

--U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Fulton Freeman to the State Department, February 1965

A few months after taking office in December 1964, Mexican president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz invited U.S. ambassador Fulton Freeman for a visit. The two men spent an hour discussing a wide range of subjects including a couple of the decade’s most pressing issues—Vietnam and Cuba. The ambassador asked the president for his government’s position on the escalating war in Southeast Asia. “Many Mexicans feel that Vietnam and Cuba are pawns in a game of international politics between the United States and the Soviet Union,” Díaz Ordaz began. He then hastened to clarify that he did not share this view, nor did his government support the Soviet or Chinese positions in the conflict. As the visit came to a close, President Díaz Ordaz asked Freeman to deliver a message to President Lyndon B. Johnson. “Any time the chips are down, Mexico will be staunchly and unwaveringly on the side of the United States,” he vowed.¹

However, Díaz Ordaz qualified his promise. “Mexico [will] never be a supine friend on its knees before the dominating will of the United States,” he cautioned.² Despite its anatomical contradictions, this suggestive statement sent a clear message: U.S.

¹ Fulton Freeman, “Telegram from Ambassador Freeman to Department of State,” February 17, 1965, Country File, NSF, Box 62, LBJ Library.

² Ibid.

leaders should pick their battles wisely. Mexico would cooperate with the United States on vital issues, but it would not allow its northern neighbor to dictate policy. Ambassador Freeman relayed Díaz Ordaz's message to Washington, D.C.

The conversation between the Mexican president and the U.S. ambassador suggests a power dynamic that challenges some of the major narratives of U.S.-Latin American relations during the Cold War. Among scholars of Mexican foreign relations, a dominant line of reasoning postulates that fear of the United States and its ability to apply political and economic pressure drove Mexican policy decisions.³ Historians of U.S. foreign relations, meanwhile, have predominantly depicted U.S. policymakers during the 1960s as dogmatic, inflexible, and divorced from reality. According to some historical accounts, American diplomats frequently behaved in an overbearing manner toward government officials of developing nations.⁴

³ For examples of this argument, see Edith B. Couturier, "Mexico," in *Latin American Foreign Policies*, ed. Harold Davis and Larman Wilson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Mario Ojeda, *Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1976); Jorge I. Domínguez and Juan Lindau, "The Primacy of Politics: Comparing the Foreign Policies of Cuba and Mexico," *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique* 5, no. 1 (1984): 75-101; Lorenzo Meyer, *La segunda muerte de la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: Cal y arena, 1992).

⁴ On U.S. dogmatism and dedication to such Cold War doctrines as the domino theory and the zero-sum game, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard H. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); J. Philipp Rosenberg, "Presidential Beliefs and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Continuity during the Cold War Era," *Political Psychology* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 1986): 733-751; Thomas G. Paterson, "Introduction: John F. Kennedy's Quest for Victory and Global Crisis," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-23; Waldo Heinrichs, "Lyndon B. Johnson: Change and Continuity," in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968*, ed. Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9-30; George C. Herring, "The Cold War and Vietnam," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (October 1, 2004): 18-21; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, And the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Campbell Craig, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Frank Costigliola, "U.S. Foreign Policy from Kennedy to Johnson," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. II: Crises and Détente (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112-133; Thomas C. Field Jr., "Ideology as

This chapter makes a revisionist contribution to the historiography of U.S.-Latin American relations by analyzing the United States' influence on a controversial aspect of Mexico's foreign policy—its ties with Cuba. Building on recent work that emphasizes the pragmatism of Kennedy and Johnson, it uses declassified government records from the United States and Mexico to tell a story that differs from the standard narratives of U.S. pressure and Mexican acquiescence.⁵ To what extent, if any, did the United States influence Mexico's relations with Castro in the decade after the Cuban Revolution?

Strategy: Military-Led Modernization and the Origins of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia,” *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 147-183.

For concise explanations of the domino theory and zero-sum game theory, see Jonathan Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 9-10; Peter G. Bennett, “Modeling Decisions in International Relations: Game Theory and Beyond,” *Merston International Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (April 1, 1995): 19-52.

On the Kennedy administration's inflexible dedication to fighting communism in Latin America, see Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Richard J. Walter, *Peru and the United States, 1960-1975: How Their Ambassadors Managed Foreign Relations in a Turbulent Era* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

On U.S. leaders' detachment from Latin American reality, see Soledad Loaeza, “Gustavo Díaz Ordaz: Las insuficiencias de la presencia autoritaria,” in *Gobernantes mexicanos*, vol. II (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008), 287-335.

⁵ More nuanced studies of U.S. policy in the Latin American context include: Jürgen Buchenau, “Por una guerra fría más templada: México entre el cambio revolucionario y la reacción estadounidense en Guatemala y Cuba,” in *Espejos de la guerra fría: México, América Central y el Caribe*, ed. Daniela Spenser (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2004), 119-150; Jefferson Morley, *Our Man in Mexico: Winston Scott and the Hidden History of the CIA* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

Studies that emphasize U.S. leaders' flexibility and pragmatism include: H. W. Brands, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Peter Kornbluh, “JFK and Castro,” *Cigar Aficionado*, October 1, 1999, http://www.cigaraficionado.com/webfeatures/show/id/JFK-and-Castro_7300; Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); David E. Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Peter Kornbluh and William M. LeoGrande, “Talking With Castro,” *Cigar Aficionado*, February 1, 2009, http://www.cigaraficionado.com/webfeatures/show/id/Talking-with-Castro_9134; Robert J. McMahon, “U.S. National Security Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. I: Origins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 288-311.

Conversely, to what extent did Mexico influence the United States' policy toward Cuba during the same period? What does the relationship between the three countries reveal about U.S. leaders' objectives and priorities in Latin America?

In the debate over Mexico's relations with Cuba, U.S. leaders ultimately yielded to their Mexican counterparts. Mexico's refusal to cut ties with Castro forced the United States to reevaluate its priorities in Latin America. After a few efforts at influencing Mexican policy, the White House and State Department decided to stop pushing and start listening. Mexican leaders convinced their U.S. counterparts that their relationship with Castro was largely superficial and that they would side with the United States on the most important issues. They also demonstrated that relations with Cuba were crucial to maintaining Mexico's political stability. This chapter argues that U.S. policymakers realized that relations among the three countries were not a zero-sum game: a connection that helped Cuba did not necessarily hurt the United States.

TESTING THE WATERS

Initially, U.S. officials in the White House and State Department tried to use political and economic leverage to influence Mexico's relations with Castro. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Thomas C. Mann made the most concerted effort to convince Mexican leaders to cut ties with Cuba. Even President Kennedy tried his hand at influencing Mexican policy. In response, President Adolfo López Mateos proved only slightly willing to bend on the Cuban issue.

As ambassador to Mexico from 1961 to 1963, Mann pushed repeatedly for the Mexican government to cut diplomatic ties with Cuba. A leading State Department specialist on Latin America whose first language was Spanish, Mann had advocated

using economic sanctions against Jacobo Arbenz's government in Guatemala in the 1950s. Later, as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, he established the so-called "Mann Doctrine," which showed tolerance toward authoritarian regimes and foreswore U.S. interventionism except in the face of a communist threat.⁶ During his time in Mexico, Mann argued that the spread of communism required an active response.

Mann considered Mexico's relations with Cuba a threat to Latin America as a whole. Before the January 1962 Organization of American States meeting in Punta del Este, Uruguay, the ambassador telegraphed Secretary of State Dean Rusk for advice. He warned that the Mexican government would probably oppose an anti-Cuba resolution and asked whether Mexico's policy of "simply acquiescing" would send the message that the OAS was incapable of defending itself against communist subversion. According to Mann, the consequences of the Mexican government's decision were so far-reaching as to be "unacceptable" to the United States. Representatives of the U.S. government had to steady their nerves and privately, tactfully demonstrate to Mexico that defense of Castro "did not pay."⁷

Ambassador Mann recommended that Washington use political and economic leverage to influence Mexico's policy. He suggested indefinitely postponing the state visit that President Kennedy was planning in order to send the message that the United States did not approve of its neighbor's "independent" policy. Mann also proposed that

⁶ "Thomas C. Mann Oral History Interview," March 13, 1968, Oral History Interview, Thomas C. Mann, JFK Library; Walter LaFeber, "Thomas C. Mann and the Devolution of Latin American Policy: From the Good Neighbor to Military Intervention," in *Behind the Throne: Servants of Power to Imperial Presidents, 1898-1968*, ed. Thomas J McCormick and Walter LaFeber (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 166-203, 176, 188. Significantly, the "Mann Doctrine" also ended the United States' policy of intervening in Latin American affairs in the name of democracy.

⁷ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, December 6, 1961, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., White House Files, Classified Subject File, WH-41, JFK Library.

the U.S. government delay action on any loans and encourage international lending institutions to do the same.⁸ He had made similar recommendations earlier that year in cables to the State Department about Mexico's "equivocal" stand on communism.⁹

The secretary of state apparently approved Thomas Mann's suggestions. The ambassador met secretly with President López Mateos and told him that given Mexico's anticipated defense of Cuba in the OAS, it would be problematic for Kennedy to visit immediately thereafter. Mann also made a veiled threat, inquiring whether López Mateos had considered that siding with Cuba might cause "a further weakening of confidence which is essential to Mexican economic growth."¹⁰ After the conversation, Mann reiterated his recommendations to the State Department to postpone Kennedy's trip and delay actions on loans. Washington took his advice to heart and delayed the visit.¹¹

In response to U.S. pressure, President López Mateos showed a partial willingness to adjust his country's stance at the January 1962 OAS meeting. He told Mann in private that he could not abandon Mexico's traditional defense of non-intervention. However, he suggested that the U.S. ambassador consult with Mexico's foreign minister before the Punta del Este gathering "to reconcile U.S. and Mexican points of view."¹² López Mateos thus opened the door for negotiation.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, June 13, 1961, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library; Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, July 17, 1961, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

¹⁰ Thomas Mann to Department of State, December 17, 1961, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

¹¹ George Ball to Embassy in Mexico City, December 19, 1961, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., White House Files, Classified Subject File, WH-41, JFK Library.

¹² Mann to Department of State, December 17, 1961.

The Mexican government eventually adopted an ambiguous position on the question of Cuba at the OAS meeting. The Mexican foreign minister, Manuel Tello, abstained from voting on resolutions that expelled Cuba from the Organization of American States and applied economic sanctions against the island. In so doing, he claimed that Mexico was maintaining its traditional defense of the principles of self-determination and non-intervention.¹³ Leftists such as writer Carlos Fuentes applauded this position.¹⁴ At the same time, however, Tello's speech to the rest of the ministers laid the juridical groundwork for Cuba's expulsion from the inter-American system. "There is a radical incompatibility," he declared, "between belonging to the Organization of American States and a Marxist-Leninist political avowal."¹⁵ His words indicated a shift in Mexico's earlier unmitigated defense of Cuba.

Mexico's ambivalent position at the OAS was not enough to satisfy Mann. The same day that Manuel Tello gave his speech about incompatibility, Mann sent a cable from Mexico City to the State Department using the Punta del Este conference as evidence that López Mateos was "going out of his way to be friendly with Communists." The ambassador recommended that the State Department arrange for the Inter-American Development Bank to "put a slow man" on the job of processing loans to Mexico in order to demonstrate that the U.S. expected cooperation to be a two-way street.¹⁶

¹³ "Punta del Este," *Política*, February 1, 1962.

¹⁴ Carlos Fuentes, "La postura de México," *Política*, February 1, 1962.

¹⁵ Manuel Tello, "Address by his Excellency Manuel Tello, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Before the First Plenary Session of the VIII Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers of the American Republic Being Held in Punta del Este, Uruguay," January 24, 1962, National Security Files, Countries, Box 54, JFK Library.

¹⁶ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, January 24, 1962, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

Mann grew more and more frustrated with Mexico's foreign policy during his time as ambassador. When a State Department official asked whether the "slow man technique" was enough to stop the so-called leftist drift of Mexican policy, Mann let loose a barrage of criticism.¹⁷ He complained that the principle objective of Mexico's foreign policy was the advancement "in a short-sighted way, of narrow, nationalistic, selfish Mexican interests." Mann claimed that for many years, the general direction of Mexican policy had been toward the type of "leftism" that was harmful to basic U.S. interests, and that those in control of the government planned to continue this trend in the future. He recommended that the United States make silent use of its economic leverage to push Mexican leaders to amend their "selfish" ways.¹⁸

A more powerful official than Thomas Mann—President John F. Kennedy—also tried his hand at influencing Mexican policy. In June 1962, Kennedy made his long-awaited state visit to Mexico. In a meeting between the presidents of the two countries, the U.S. head of state raised the issue of Cuba. "What did Mexico think should be done to prevent the spread of Communism in other American Republics?" Kennedy asked.¹⁹ López Mateos replied that economic growth was the best way to combat the threat and pointed to the Alliance for Progress as a promising initiative.

Kennedy's efforts to push López Mateos into a harder line on Castro and communism failed. He returned again and again to his chief concern: What was Mexico

¹⁷ State Department to Mexico City embassy, April 12, 1963, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., White House Files, Classified Subject File, WH-41, JFK Library.

¹⁸ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, April 16, 1963, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

¹⁹ "Communism in Latin America," June 29, 1962, National Security Files, Trips and Conferences, Box 236, JFK Library.

doing to fight communism? López Mateos's foreign minister, also present at the meeting, reminded the U.S. president that Mexico had contributed the doctrine of incompatibility to the debates over Cuba at the Punta del Este conference. López Mateos kept reiterating his argument that economic development and social progress were the answer. By the end of the meeting, President Kennedy settled for promises of future discussions of measures to combat the communist threat.

During a follow-up meeting the next day, President López Mateos tried to smooth the feathers he had ruffled with his position on Cuba. He recognized that his relations with Castro had created doubts "in some parts of United States' opinion" about Mexico's loyalties. López Mateos told Kennedy that he wished to reassure him and his people that "in case any conflict should arise, Mexico would be glad to guard the United States' rear with its 35 million people."²⁰ The Mexican president was not willing to cut relations with Cuba, but he vowed that his country's fundamental ties and loyalties were with the United States. An unprecedented international event would soon force López Mateos to live up to this promise.

IN TIMES OF CRISIS

On October 22, 1962, John F. Kennedy revealed to the world that the Soviet Union had installed nuclear missiles in Cuba with offensive capabilities. He announced a quarantine of the island and demanded that the weapons be removed. The Cuban Missile Crisis put Mexico's ambiguous foreign policy to the test. When it counted the most, would Mexico side with Cuba or the United States?

²⁰ "Salinity and Other Problems," June 30, 1962, National Security Files, Trips and Conferences, Box 236, JFK Library.

In the weeks leading up to the crisis, López Mateos had maintained his non-committal defense of Cuba. On October 3, during a stopover in Los Angeles on his way to Asia, the president told U.S. reporters that his sources indicated that Castro possessed only defensive weapons. “If the arms are defensive, we do not consider [Cuba to have] a dangerous arsenal,” he stated. However, López Mateos did open the door for a change in policy. He explained that if the weapons were offensive, “the situation would be different.”²¹

Even after Kennedy’s television broadcast on October 22 announcing the presence of offensive missile sites in Cuba, López Mateos avoided making any formal commitments. He told reporters in the Philippines that his position was the same as always: if Cuba was arming itself defensively, it presented no threat. This time, his audience pressed for clarification. What was the difference between offensive and defensive weapons? The president responded that anti-aircraft missiles were acceptable, while ground-to-ground ones constituted a threat to world peace. He insisted that he would do nothing until the Organization of American States and the United Nations had seen proof and decided upon a course of action.²²

The White House demanded a clearer answer: Would Mexico approve an OAS resolution condemning the missiles? Kennedy was determined to have unanimous support for the blockade. López Mateos’s airplane was en route from the Philippines to Mexico during the crucial hours of debate. The man who worked as director of information in the Ministry of the Interior at the time, Luis M. Farías, recalled in his

²¹ *Presencia internacional de Adolfo López Mateos*, vol. 1 (Mexico City, 1963), 296.

²² *Ibid.*, 391-392; Carlos Denegri, “Nueva actitud si Cuba tiene poder ofensivo,” *Excélsior*, October 23, 1962.

memoirs that his supervisor, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, had to make the decision. Farías recounts how his good friend Thomas Mann contacted him and asked to see the minister of the interior. “You can tell President Kennedy,” Díaz Ordaz told Mann, “that we have always supported Cuba’s right to have defensive weapons but not offensive ones. In this case you are right. The weapons are foreign, controlled by the Russians, who want to take advantage of Cuban territory to threaten the United States.”²³ After giving Mexico’s answer to the U.S. ambassador, the minister of the interior called López Mateos during his layover in Hawaii to tell him what had happened.

A conflicting account suggests that López Mateos made the final decision about Mexico’s position during the missile crisis. According to the U.S. ambassador to the OAS at the time, Delesseps S. Morrison, Kennedy spoke with López Mateos twice over the phone after announcing the presence of offensive missiles, when the latter was first in Manila and then in Hawaii.²⁴ It is thus possible that López Mateos, rather than Díaz Ordaz, decided that Mexico would stand beside the United States.

When López Mateos returned to Mexico, he immediately demonstrated where his country’s loyalties lay. Speaking from the balcony of the national palace, he declared: “We are in the ranks of democracy. We will fight for peace and for liberty.”²⁵ The ranks of which he spoke were those of the United States. Defending Cuba on principle was one

²³ Luis M. Farías, *Así lo recuerdo: Testimonio político*. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), 236.

²⁴ Delesseps S. Morrison, *Latin American Mission: An Adventure in Hemisphere Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 244.

²⁵ *Presencia internacional de Adolfo López Mateos*, 399.

thing, but defending Castro's right to possess nuclear weapons capable of reaching Mexico City or Washington was another matter.²⁶

U.S. leaders appreciated Mexico's stance during that time of crisis. A year and a half later, Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote a memorandum to President Lyndon Johnson about López Mateos. "At times his foreign policy has been too independent—for example on Cuba," Rusk acknowledged. He continued, "but when fundamental issues are at stake we have usually found him understanding and willing to be helpful."²⁷ Johnson expressed the same sentiment more colloquially in a subsequent meeting with López Mateos. The U.S. president said he was sure that "when the chips were down Mexico would be on the side of the United States."²⁸ López Mateos confirmed his impression.

López Mateos's successor, Díaz Ordaz, used the exact same turn of phrase when he reassured Johnson that Mexico would continue to remain loyal to the United States. Díaz Ordaz made a visit to Johnson's ranch in Texas in November 1964, on the heels of both his own election and Mexico's controversial refusal to cut relations with Cuba. In a conversation between the U.S. president and the Mexican president-elect, Díaz Ordaz reminded Johnson of Mexico's position during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He said it was proof that "the United States could be absolutely sure that when the chips were really

²⁶ For more on the response to the Cuban Missile Crisis in Mexican civil society, see Chapter Four of this dissertation and Manuel Marcué Pardiñas, "La política internacional del gobierno del presidente Adolfo López Mateos," *Política*, December 1, 1962.

²⁷ Dean Rusk memorandum for the President, February 18, 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 61, Folder 2, Document 9, LBJ Library.

²⁸ "Meeting Between President Johnson and President López Mateos," February 21, 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 61, Folder 2, Document 34b, LBJ Library.

down, Mexico would be unequivocally by its side.”²⁹ President Johnson thanked his counterpart.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was not just a defining moment for U.S. relations with Cuba and the Soviet Union; it was also a fundamental test of Mexico’s relations with Cuba and the United States. Until those thirteen days in October, Mexican leaders had been able to maintain an ambiguous policy of defending Castro publicly while privately swearing loyalty to Washington. But when Kennedy presented the world with indisputable proof of nuclear warheads in the Caribbean, Mexico had to choose a side. López Mateos and his minister of the interior Díaz Ordaz aligned their country with “the ranks of democracy,” demonstrating that in times of crisis, Mexico would stand at the side of the United States.

THE INTERNAL ENGINES OF MEXICO’S FOREIGN POLICY

Though allegiance in times of crisis helped ease tensions, the main reason that the White House and State Department did not push harder for Mexico to cut relations with Cuba was understanding of Mexico’s domestic situation. They knew full well the important role that Mexico’s foreign policy played in maintaining stability under the one-party rule of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). If the PRI fell from power, a leftist party could replace it. Mexican leaders capitalized on their relations with Castro in order to placate and outflank their leftist critics, and U.S. observers knew it. While they publicly opposed Mexico’s position on Cuba and initially tried to change it, U.S.

²⁹ “Mexican-Cuban Relations,” November 12, 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 61, Folder 5, Document 39b, LBJ Library.

policymakers for the most part eventually agreed with their Mexican counterparts: Mexico's domestic stability was the top priority.

Shortly after Castro seized power, the CIA and State Department both noticed that ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas's support of Cuba played a critical role in shaping Mexican policy. In September 1959, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico spoke to members of López Mateos's cabinet about Cárdenas's recent visit to Havana. He reported that the former president's influence "could be such as to make the president hesitate to follow a program which would arouse the opposition of Cárdenas and his followers."³⁰

CIA analysts believed that Cárdenas and other leftists significantly shaped Mexico's foreign policy. In August 1960, they wrote that President López Mateos and other leaders were concerned about mounting pressure and Lázaro Cárdenas's apparent rise in popularity. "There is considerable evidence that Mexico's equivocation on the Cuban question has been largely due to the efforts of a leftist minority to force the government into a firmer pro-Castro stand," the CIA observed. Spokesmen of the Mexican government had told U.S. investigators that the warm reception for Cuban president Dorticós had been designed to prevent leftist activity from threatening domestic stability. "While many government leaders privately deplore the excesses of the Castro regime," the CIA concluded, "it is unlikely that they will show open hostility to it, since a large number of Mexicans—perhaps led by Lázaro Cárdenas—still find a close parallel between the goals of the Cuban and Mexican revolutions."³¹

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, American Republics*, vol. V, FRUS (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), 880.

³¹ CIA, "Leftist Pressures in Mexico," August 4, 1960, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

Analysts in the State Department came to a similar conclusion at the same time. A background paper prepared for the August 1960 OAS meeting in San José, Costa Rica, went into great detail about Mexico's internal politics. "Because of the domestic situation in Mexico," the report began, "the present Cuban situation presents an extremely delicate problem to the Government of Mexico." The State Department analyst went on to describe demonstrations and riots among workers and campesinos as well as rumors that Lázaro Cárdenas was starting a new leftist political party. "In an effort to counter this development a number of PRI members, including the president himself... have made statements asserting that the PRI and the López Mateos administration is leftist and not opposed to the economic and social aims of the Castro regime," the report argued.³²

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was well aware of the domestic pressures that his colleague López Mateos faced. In October 1960, he had a conversation with various State Department and army officials about Cuba. Eisenhower expressed concern that sanctions against Castro might cause trouble in the Organization of American States. "If Mexico were to become disgruntled and if we were to see the Communists come to power there, in all likelihood we would have to go to war about all this," he worried. Eisenhower described the sanctions as a very difficult move so far as Mexico was concerned. Under Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon agreed, acknowledging that the Mexican government was "under great pressure from the Cárdenas Leftists."³³ In fact,

³² "Meeting of Foreign Ministers, San José, August 1960: Bilateral Paper—Mexico," August 12, 1960, RG 59 (State Department), Entry A1 3148, ARC 2363836, Box 6, U.S. National Archives. CIA reports from the previous years had also repeatedly warned about labor unrest threatening Mexico's stability. See CIA, "Growing Labor Unrest in Mexico," June 26, 1958, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives; CIA, "Mexican Labor Troubles," September 2, 1958, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives; CIA, "The New López Mateos Administration in Mexico," November 20, 1958, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960. Cuba*, vol. VI (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), 1085.

Eisenhower was so concerned about Mexican stability that he decided to delay the actions against Castro until after he had spoken with López Mateos.

Shortly thereafter, López Mateos spelled out the connections between internal unrest and Mexico's foreign policy in a private conversation with the head of the CIA. When Allen Dulles observed that Cuba's government was "definitely Communist" and thus problematic for all of Latin America, the Mexican president heartily agreed. López Mateos explained that he had to consider the possibility of internal security problems as a result of "Castroism" since that "there was a large body of sympathy for Castro and his Revolution in Mexico."³⁴ He added that even though he personally would like to see him overthrown, the Cuban leader's popularity in Mexico was such that he could take no overt action.

The CIA found López Mateos's arguments about domestic pressures convincing. A month after the meeting between López Mateos and Dulles, the Central Intelligence Agency produced a special working paper on the attitudes of Latin American countries toward Cuba that reflected the president's remarks. The report put Mexico in the category of "countries that for domestic reasons [appear] either unwilling or unable to come out openly against Castro." The CIA contended that "leading officials in Mexico [who] would like to see the Cuban dictator done away with" were hindered by Mexico's revolutionary heritage and "the strong sympathy of a few weight-swinging politicians for things Cuban and Communist."³⁵

³⁴ "Meeting Between López Mateos and Dulles," January 14, 1961, RG 263 CIA Miscellaneous Files JFK -M-7 (F1) to JFK -M-7 (F3) Box 6 . JFK-MISC 104-10310-10001, U.S. National Archives. For more on López Mateos's conversation with Dulles, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

³⁵ CIA, "Attitudes of Other Latin American Governments toward Cuba," February 13, 1961, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

CIA and State Department officials worried that the Cuba issue could disrupt the PRI's monopoly over Mexican politics and open the door to other groups. In a report about Mexico's mid-term elections, intelligence analysts said that the López Mateos administration was appealing to leftist sentiment in order to both minimize Cárdenas's influence and to deter the ex-president from supporting candidates of opposing parties.³⁶ A State Department official concurred in a memorandum describing the battle for control of Mexico's leftist groups. "Unfortunately, López Mateos has felt it necessary to go far to the left to sap the political support of Cárdenas and in the process has taken a highly equivocal stand on Cuba," he remarked.³⁷ U.S. officials were not pleased with Mexico's policy toward Cuba, but they understood the logic behind it.

The need to maintain Mexican stability became increasingly urgent as the country's 1964 presidential elections approached, a fact that tempered U.S. attempts to gain Mexican cooperation in hemispheric actions against Cuba. When Secretary of State Dean Rusk pressed Mexican ambassador Antonio Carrillo Flores to reassess his country's position on Cuba in September 1962, the ambassador replied that President López Mateos was "trying to find a solution that would not boomerang." He explained that Mexico "was limited by its own political situation and upcoming presidential election."³⁸

López Mateos gave a similar answer about electoral necessities to the assistant secretary of state when questioned on the subject of Cuba. The president reiterated his

³⁶ CIA, "Mexican Congressional and Gubernatorial Elections, 2 July 1961," June 5, 1961, CIA CREST Database, U.S. National Archives.

³⁷ Robert A. Stevenson, "Ambassador Mann's Request for Approval of Meeting with Lázaro Cárdenas," July 6, 1961, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 8, U.S. National Archives.

³⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: American Republics*, vol. XII (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 320.

willingness to give public support to any action against Cuba necessary to prevent a serious threat, as during the missile crisis, but added that he would not join in symbolic measures. López Mateos explained that he was especially concerned about the domestic impact of public actions against Castro because he was trying to secure the support of all elements of his party for his upcoming designation of the next presidential candidate. “With tensions increasing each year between the left and right wings of the party, these objectives can only be secured by avoiding public positions which would tend to alienate either group,” the president argued.³⁹

U.S. journalists agreed that Mexico’s defense of Cuba responded to internal pressures. Virginia Prewett of the *Washington Daily News* called Mexico’s policy on Cuba “an election-year sop to the Cárdenas faction.”⁴⁰ In another article, she claimed that Mexico’s ambassador to the Organization of American States had insisted that the 1964 OAS meeting to decide sanctions against Cuba be postponed until after Mexico’s presidential elections.⁴¹ *New York Times* correspondent Tad Szulc described the Mexican government as “highly sensitive to the leftist wing of domestic public opinion” in an article about various countries’ reluctance to punish Castro.⁴²

U.S. officials and observers agreed: the Mexican government’s policy toward Cuba was a calculated response to domestic pressures. Lázaro Cárdenas and other leftists were enjoying a surge in power and popularity in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. At

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴⁰ Virginia Prewett, “Cuba-Mexico are Working a Double Play,” *Washington Daily News*, April 27, 1964.

⁴¹ Virginia Prewett, “Mexico Fights OAS Action Against Cuba,” *Washington Daily News*, June 24, 1964.

⁴² Tad Szulc, “Cuba: Dilemma for OAS: Deep Instability of Hemisphere Reflected in the Reluctance to Impose Sanctions on Castro,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1964.

the same time, workers and campesinos threatened to upset the economic status quo. U.S. leaders agreed with their Mexican counterparts that something had to be done to minimize further leftist activism and protect Mexico's stability. Maintaining relations with Cuba enabled the Mexican government to appease all the leftist groups at once without making any substantial political or economic changes. Washington approved.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

Another reason U.S. leaders generally refrained from pushing their Mexican counterparts to cut ties with Cuba was because they understood that multiple parties could benefit from the relationship. True, Mexico's diplomatic defense of Castro gave him a useful rhetorical and practical connection to the outside world.⁴³ But Mexican leaders checked the utility of the bridge by taking quiet measures against Cuba. Furthermore, they balanced the drawbacks of their relations with Castro by using the connection to their own advantage as well as that of the United States.

U.S. leaders could see one of the gaps between rhetoric and reality in Mexico's trade with Cuba. In 1961, less than a year after the foreign minister had defended Cuba in the Organization of American States, Mexico's imports from Cuba dropped from eleven million pesos to a little under three million (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2).⁴⁴ Mexico's imports from Cuba continued to decline the following year and remained negligible for the rest of the decade. In this manner, the Mexican government implemented the sanctions against Castro without officially approving them.

⁴³ For more details on the ways that Castro benefitted from his ties with Mexico, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

⁴⁴ On Mexico's opposition to sanctions at the VII Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the OAS in San José, Costa Rica, in August 1960, see Leticia Bobadilla González, *México y la OEA: Los debates diplomáticos, 1959-1964* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2006), 75.

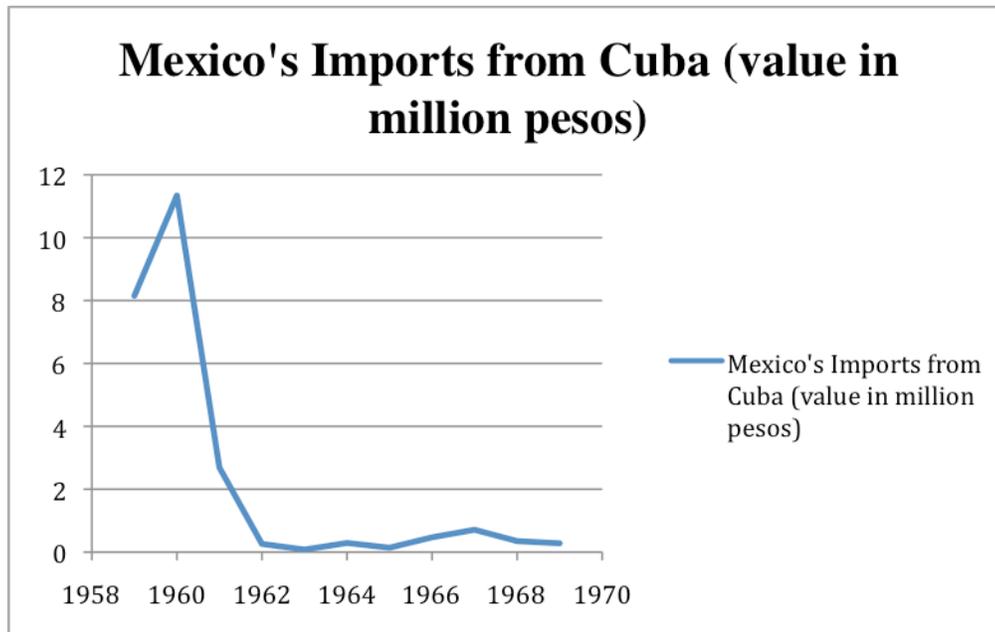


Figure 6.1: Mexico's Imports from Cuba, 1959-1969

Year	Mexico's Imports from Cuba (Value in million pesos)
1959	8.15
1960	11.24
1961	2.69
1962	0.26
1963	0.08
1964	0.29
1965	0.14
1966	0.47
1967	0.71
1968	0.35
1969	0.28

Figure 6.2: Mexico's Imports from Cuba, 1959-1969

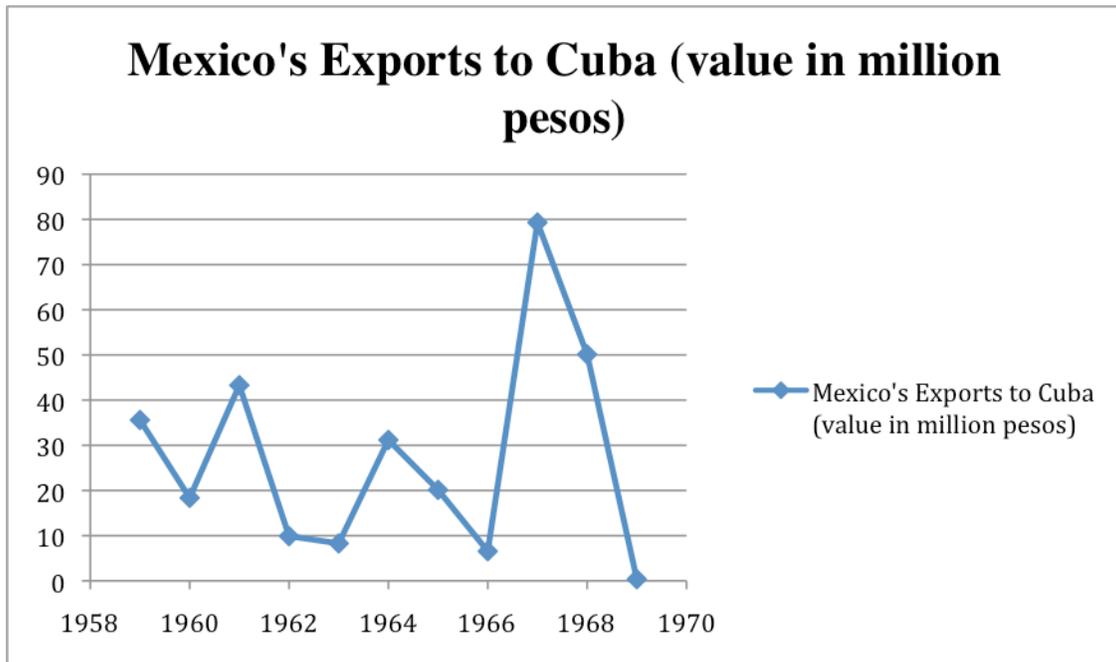


Figure 6.3: Mexico's Exports to Cuba, 1959-1969

Year	Mexico's Exports to Cuba (Value in million pesos)
1959	35.6
1960	18.37
1961	43.3
1962	9.9
1963	8.29
1964	31.19
1965	20.14
1966	6.56
1967	79.31
1968	50.12
1969	0.37

Figure 6.4: Mexico's Exports to Cuba, 1959-1969. Source: *United Nations Yearbook of International Trade Statistics* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1963, 1966, 1969).

Controlling Mexican exports to Cuba proved a greater challenge. Throughout the 1960s, the volume of exports fluctuated (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4). President López Mateos told Ambassador Mann in December 1961 that Mexico had taken unilateral measures against Castro including refusing to sell petroleum products and preventing delivery of foodstuffs to the island. The two men also discussed cooperating to prevent the transshipment of U.S. goods to Cuba.⁴⁵ The latter effort apparently failed; in 1964 the Department of Commerce reported that Mexico was one of the three principle transshipment points in the world for U.S.-origin products going to Cuba. Most significantly, automobile parts and equipment from the United States entered the Caribbean island through this channel.⁴⁶

Mexican authorities managed to apply unofficial sanctions against Cuba in other, more effective, ways. In 1962, Ambassador Mann observed that the Mexican government denied port facilities to ships engaging in trade between Cuba and the Soviet bloc.⁴⁷ Authorities in the international airport in Mexico City compiled lists and photographs of everyone traveling to and from Cuba, which they shared with the CIA.⁴⁸ They marked the

⁴⁵ Mann to Department of State, December 17, 1961.

⁴⁶ “Ninth Meeting of Foreign Ministers Pan American Union, Washington DC, July 21-24 1964 Background Paper: Cuban Foreign Trade,” July 17, 1964, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 1, U.S. National Archives.

⁴⁷ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, December 31, 1962, National Security Files, Countries, Box 54, JFK Library.

⁴⁸ On photographing operations at the Mexico City airport, see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: American Republics*, XII, 245; “Cuban Airlists,” December 19, 1963, RG 233 Box 90 Reel 46 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10516-10312, U.S. National Archives; “Procuraduria: Los censores del aeropuerto,” *Política*, August 1, 1962; Anne Goodpasture, “Mexico City Station History”, November 16, 1978, RG 263 CIA Russ Holmes Work File Box 22 RIF 104-10414-10124, U.S. National Archives. This last document is a partially declassified 500-page internal history of the CIA station in Mexico City, written by the woman who was Chief of Station Winston Scott’s assistant.

passports of everyone arriving from Havana with a special “Entry From Cuba” stamp to prevent clandestine travel.⁴⁹ U.S. authorities summed up Mexico’s efforts in a briefing book for President Johnson: “Mexico has taken unpublicized measures to restrict travel to and from Cuba and has cooperated with U.S. against Castro in other ways which do not draw public attention.”⁵⁰

The Mexican government restricted travel between Cuba and the mainland by tightening controls over visas. In September 1960, Mexican visa regulations for Cuban nationals changed to conform to the U.S. State Department’s policy. Under the new rules, all requests for travel had to go through the Ministry of the Interior in Mexico City, leading to long delays and a backlog of requests. Meanwhile, the CIA used a special channel in the ministry to expedite visas for certain Cuban dissidents.⁵¹ The stricter limits on travel permissions hampered Cuban citizens’ ability to take advantage of the air connection between Mexico and Cuba. Grateful, U.S. leaders in Washington carefully avoided any public comment on Mexico’s cooperation in “using its key political and geographic position to help control Castro.”⁵²

Mexican and U.S. officials observed that their countries could benefit from the maintenance of relations between Mexico and Cuba. Shortly after Mexico defied the

⁴⁹ Thomas Mann to Secretary of State, April 3, 1963, National Security Files, Countries, Box 141, JFK Library.

⁵⁰ “Meeting of Presidents Johnson and López Mateos in California, February 20-22 1964: Background Paper: U.S.-Mexican Cooperation On Cuba,” February 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 61, LBJ Library.

⁵¹ Willard C. Curtis, “Processes for Cubans to Obtain Mexican Visas,” October 25, 1963, RG 233 Box 72 /32 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10092-10135, U.S. National Archives.

⁵² Dean Rusk memorandum to President Johnson, February 18, 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 61, Folder 2, Document 9, LBJ Library.

1964 OAS resolution to cut all ties with Castro, Mexican president-elect Díaz Ordaz remarked to the U.S. ambassador at a dinner party that it could be useful to leave ajar the only remaining door from Cuba to Latin America.⁵³ Secretary of State Dean Rusk seemed to agree. He told the National Security Council that the United States did not push Mexico to break its connections with Cuba because it was the last remaining air link between Havana and the mainland.⁵⁴ He also advised President Johnson not to pressure President-elect Díaz Ordaz on the Cuba issue. “During our foreign ministers meeting in late July, a number of U.S.—Brazil and others—talked about the practical desirability of having one Latin American embassy [in Cuba] if possible... and so the hemisphere is fairly relaxed about the Mexicans staying on there for a time,” Rusk explained.⁵⁵

This agreement about the benefits of Mexico’s ties to Cuba endured. Three years after Mexico became the only Latin American country to maintain relations with Castro in 1964, the U.S. deputy chief of mission in the embassy in Mexico cabled the State Department about the matter. He mentioned an “informal understanding” at the highest levels of the U.S. and Mexican governments that the latter should maintain relations with Castro so that “one OAS country can have [a] foot in the door which might sometime be helpful.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Fulton Freeman to Secretary of State, August 25, 1964, National Security Files, Mexico, Box 58, Folder 9, Document 75, LBJ Library.

⁵⁴ “Summary Record on National Security Meeting No. 536, July 28, 1964,” July 28, 1964, National Security Files, NSC Meetings File, Box 1, LBJ Library.

⁵⁵ [Telephone Conversation between Johnson and Rusk], Recordings of Telephone Conversations-White House Series (Tape WH6411.18: Dean Rusk, 9:40 a.m., PNO 6342, 1964).

⁵⁶ Henry Dearborn to the Secretary of State, June 28, 1967, RG 59 (State Department), CFPF 67-69, POL Cuba-A, U.S. National Archives.

One group certainly benefitted from the open door between Mexico and Cuba: U.S. citizens who sought repatriation to the United States from the island. On multiple occasions throughout the 1960s, Mexican officials facilitated the departure of U.S. nationals and their families from Cuba.⁵⁷ In December 1966, Mexican ambassador Fernando Pámanes Escobedo convinced Castro to authorize the repatriation of approximately two thousand citizens of the United States, who would return to their homeland via Mexico.⁵⁸ The U.S. ambassador cautioned his superiors to keep this assistance in mind when deciding whether to try to push Mexico on Cuban matters in the OAS.⁵⁹

Mexico's maintenance of relations with Cuba hindered U.S. efforts to isolate Castro; however, the ties between the two Latin American nations were not as beneficial to Castro as they appeared, nor were they as harmful to the United States. Mexican leaders took steps to minimize the economic advantages for Cuba, while at the same time restricting and monitoring travel to the island. What is more, U.S. citizens and the U.S. government profited in important ways from the foot that the Mexican government held in the Cuban door.

⁵⁷ For examples of press releases about repatriation, see Dirección General de Información, “[repatriation of U.S. citizens],” December 5, 1968, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN. For an example of an intelligence report on the subject, see Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “Estado de Yucatán,” December 28, 1966, IPS Caja 2958 E, AGN.

⁵⁸ “Gracias a México, salen de Cuba cientos de norteamericanos: Puente aéreo entre La Habana y Mérida,” *Excélsior*, December 29, 1966.

⁵⁹ Fulton Freeman to Secretary of State, September 1967, National Security Files, Mexico, Memos and Miscellaneous, Volume III, 3/67-11/67 (2 of 3), LBJ Library.

SPIES

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency benefitted enormously from Mexico's relations with Cuba. The Cuban embassy in Mexico City served as a window onto Castro's government, and CIA agents did their utmost to monitor and exploit that connection. The Mexican embassy in Havana also became a hotspot for international espionage. Close cooperation in intelligence operations between U.S. and Mexican officials sweetened the deal.

The State Department was well aware of the intelligence opportunities that Mexico's relations with Cuba presented. In a memorandum about the possible repercussions of a break between the two countries, U.S. embassy officials observed: "existing communications and travel between Mexico and Cuba provide an extremely useful intelligence channel used by U.S. agencies." The report described Castro's espionage operations in Mexico as relatively minor compared to those of the United States, concluding, "The severance of relations would affect U.S. intelligence collection capability far more adversely than it would the Cuban capacity in Mexico."⁶⁰

The CIA's Mexico City station was one of the U.S. government's best sources for information on Cuba. The largest in the hemisphere, it employed nearly fifty full-time personnel in the 1960s.⁶¹ Since the station was located in the U.S. embassy, many of its employees worked under State Department cover. For example, Francis Sherry, one of the directors of Cuban operations, posed as a U.S. embassy official.⁶² Other agents had non-official covers outside the State Department. The CIA also worked with various

⁶⁰ U.S. Embassy--Mexico, "Effect in Mexico of Severance of Mexican-Cuban Relations," June 8, 1964, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 1, U.S. National Archives.

⁶¹ Philip Agee, *Inside the Company*, 524.

⁶² Agee, *Inside the Company*, 531.

professionals in Mexico, including lawyers, businessmen, and technicians, who assisted in support tasks in the course of their regular activities.⁶³

The CIA collaborated closely with its Mexican hosts. The chief of the Mexico City station, Winston Scott, befriended the most powerful people in the country soon after his arrival in 1956. In an operation code-named LITEMPO, the CIA built a network of contacts and agents within the Mexican government. President López Mateos, code named LITENSOR, and his minister of the interior and successor Díaz Ordaz, or LITEMPO-2, both cooperated with the CIA's operations.⁶⁴ Díaz Ordaz's nephew, LITEMPO-1, served as the contact between the Mexican government and the CIA and received a regular salary for his efforts.⁶⁵ By the mid-1960s, as many as two hundred "indigenous agents," or Mexican citizens, assisted the agency.⁶⁶ These included the head of the Department of Federal Security, Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios or LITEMPO-4, and Díaz Ordaz's minister of the interior and successor, Luis Echeverría or LITEMPO-8.⁶⁷

Cooperating with the CIA was good business for Mexican officials. Scott helped arrange wiretaps of López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz's most powerful rivals and critics, including Lázaro Cárdenas, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.⁶⁸ The station gave the Mexican presidents daily intelligence summaries of domestic and

⁶³ Ibid., 533.

⁶⁴ Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 90, 94. For further evidence that Gustavo Díaz Ordaz was "LITEMPO-2," see Willard C. Curtis, "LITEMPO Operational Report 1-3; October 1963," November 7, 1963, RG 233 Box 90 Reel 46 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10211-10102, U.S. National Archives.

⁶⁵ Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History." On the significance of this document, see footnote 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 94.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 93.

international developments.⁶⁹ It provided advice and equipment for a secret communications network to connect the Ministry of the Interior in Mexico City with principal cities in the rest of the country.⁷⁰ Bribery also abounded. Díaz Ordaz received four hundred dollars a month from the CIA during his presidential campaign and, if rumors were true, an automobile for his mistress.⁷¹

Personal connections formed the backbone of the relationship between the CIA and the Mexican government. Winston Scott developed close friendships with both López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz. The CIA station chief breakfasted with López Mateos every available Sunday at the president's mansion.⁷² The top two Mexican officials attended Scott's wedding in 1962 and López Mateos served as the chief witness.⁷³ They trusted the chief of station to such an extent that they preferred to conduct the business of U.S.-Mexican relations with him, in effect circumventing the State Department.⁷⁴

Friendships between CIA agents and Mexican officials existed on lower rungs of the ladder as well. Díaz Ordaz's nephew, Emiliano Bolanos Díaz, became extremely close to the coordinator of the LITEMPO program, George Munro, a former FBI agent also known as Jeremy K. Benadum. Munro had met Bolanos while working for the

⁶⁹ Agee, *Inside the Company*, 526.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁷¹ Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History;" Agee, *Inside the Company*, 275.

⁷² Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 112.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 108; Agee, *Inside the Company*, 525.

Federal Bureau of Investigation and had built a large part of the LITEMPO network from that initial contact. The two men even served as godparents to each other's children.⁷⁵

The CIA's ties with Mexican leaders facilitated communication between the two governments. According to an internal history of the agency's Mexico City station, the relationship "became an unofficial channel for the exchange of selected, sensitive political information which each government wanted the other to receive but not through public protocol exchanges." U.S. Ambassadors Robert Hill and Thomas Mann apparently approved of this arrangement, but Fulton Freeman, who replaced Mann in 1964, resented what he perceived as the CIA's encroachment on his professional territory.⁷⁶

The Mexico City station conducted one of the most extensive and expensive intelligence programs in the CIA. Operations included photographic surveillance, wiretapping, infiltration, and recruitment.⁷⁷ Agents under cover as students collected information about activities at the National Autonomous University and the Colegio de México.⁷⁸ The station spent at least five thousand dollars a month to disseminate anti-communist propaganda through bulletins, articles, editorials, and advertisements.⁷⁹ It

⁷⁵ On the friendship between Bolanos Díaz and Munro, see Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History." On Munro's identification as Benadum, see Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 91.

⁷⁶ Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History."

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Willard C. Curtis, "LIMOTOR Progress Report January-July 1963," October 30, 1963, RG 233 Box 90 Reel 46 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10211-10070, U.S. National Archives. "Willard C. Curtis" was Chief of Station Winston Scott's pseudonym. Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 289, 356; John Newman, *Oswald and the CIA: The Documented Truth About the Unknown Relationship Between the U.S. Government and the Alleged Killer of JFK* (Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 2008), 606.

⁷⁹ Willard C. Curtis, "LILISP-E Progress Report for September-October 1963," November 6, 1963, RG 233 Box 90 Reel 46 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10211-10117, U.S. National Archives.

spent more than four thousand dollars a year supporting a national Catholic student group.⁸⁰ One operation even involved using stink bombs against enemy targets.⁸¹

The most important enemy target was, of course, Cuba. Castro officially became the top priority when Chief of Station Winston Scott returned from a White House regional conference in May 1960.⁸² The station tapped every telephone line in the Cuban embassy and in the official residences of its diplomats. Photographic surveillance recorded everyone who entered and exited the embassy. CIA agents sorted through the Cubans' trash and mail for information. They installed hidden microphones throughout the embassy, including inside walls, love seats, and the leg of a coffee table in the ambassador's office.⁸³

The CIA coordinated many of its anti-Cuban operations with Mexican officials, especially those in the Department of Federal Security. For example, the surveillance of travel between Mexico and Cuba required cooperation between U.S. and Mexican agencies. In 1962, a CIA technician, along with two local agents, installed a concealed passport camera in the Mexico City airport to photograph everyone traveling to or from Havana. The technician would periodically service the camera and pick up the film during meetings with the Mexican chief immigration inspector. After a few years, the Department of Federal Security took over the operation, while still giving the film to the

⁸⁰ Willard C. Curtis, "LIEVICT Status Report for May and June 1963," October 17, 1963, RG 233 Box 72 /32 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10092-10089, U.S. National Archives.

⁸¹ Willard C. Curtis, "Operational Monthly Report--1-30 September 1963," October 18, 1963, RG 233 Box 72 /32 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10092-10083, U.S. National Archives.

⁸² Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History."

⁸³ *Ibid.*

CIA for processing.⁸⁴ This collaboration helped both the U.S. and Mexico keep track of Castro's efforts to export revolution.

Intelligence operations against Castro and his affiliates paid dividends for both the United States and Mexico. On one occasion in 1963, the CIA intercepted two calls to the Cuban embassy from a man visiting Mexico City who wanted to help Castro from inside the United States. The agency authorized an agent, an exiled Cuban journalist, to impersonate an embassy official and meet with the caller. During the meeting, the aspiring revolutionary claimed to have good contacts in the United States and offered to help the Cubans "move things from one place to another."⁸⁵ He agreed to wait for further instructions. Chief of Station Winston Scott relayed the information to Washington, and the FBI prosecuted the man who wanted to help Castro as soon as he returned to the United States.

The CIA's wiretaps and audio surveillance snared another suspicious character: a naturalized Mexican journalist of Spanish origin, Víctor Rico Galán. One of the founders of the National Liberation Movement in Mexico, Rico Galán visited Cuba on multiple occasions between 1962 and 1965. He also traveled to several other Latin American countries during that time, purportedly because the Cubans asked him to meet with local communist leaders. The CIA's Mexico City station noted that Rico Galán's contacts with the Cuban embassy increased sharply in 1965; telephone intercepts of the conversations revealed that the journalist was criticizing President Díaz Ordaz and trying to form a new,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 155-156.

leftist political party. Mexican authorities arrested Rico Galán in 1966 and imprisoned him for seven years for conspiring against the government.⁸⁶

CIA agents in the Mexico City station showed early interest in a Mexican woman who later became embroiled in one of the greatest controversies of the twentieth century. Silvia Durán, an employee in the Cuban embassy, had attracted the attention of U.S. intelligence agents in 1961 or 1962 thanks to her affair with Ambassador Carlos Lechuga.⁸⁷ On September 27, 1963, Durán spoke with a visitor to the embassy named Lee Harvey Oswald. He was trying to obtain a transit visa to travel to the island en route to the Soviet Union. When Durán called the Soviet embassy about the matter, the CIA's wiretap picked up the conversation.

After Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, Mexican authorities helped the CIA investigate the woman who had spoken with Oswald at the Cuban embassy. Chief of Station Winston Scott asked his local colleagues to question Silvia Durán, and they complied.⁸⁸ The day after the assassination, agents of the Department of Federal Security arrested Durán and interrogated her for hours.⁸⁹ The Cuban foreign minister publicly protested that they had beaten her and accused her of having an affair with Oswald.⁹⁰ The CIA obtained a written statement from Durán's interrogators about

⁸⁶ Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History."

⁸⁷ W. David Slawson, "Warren Commission Trip to Mexico City," May 22, 1964, RG 233 Box 61 JFK/CIA RIF 104-10086-10254, U.S. National Archives.

⁸⁸ Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 210.

⁸⁹ "El caso Kennedy-Durán," *Política*, December 1, 1963.

⁹⁰ Raúl Roa, "Texto de la nota entregada el día 26 de noviembre de 1963 por el ministro de relaciones exteriores de Cuba, Doctor Raúl Roa, al embajador de México en aquel país, profesor Gilberto Bosques," November 26, 1963, Leg. III-5714-2, SRE.

her interactions with the American at the Cuban embassy, but this information did little to unravel the mystery surrounding Kennedy's assassination.⁹¹

Some Mexican officials went even further in aiding U.S. efforts to monitor Cuba by providing detailed information about developments on the island itself. The Mexican embassy in Havana developed into a center not just of diplomacy, but also of espionage and intrigue. As the ties between Mexico and Cuba became increasingly exceptional throughout the 1960s, this source of information proved especially useful.

The Mexican ambassador to Cuba from 1965-1967, Fernando Pámanes Escobedo, aided U.S. intelligence operations during his stay on the island. Fulton Freeman, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, planted the seeds for this collaboration during a friendly luncheon in Mexico City. During the meal, Pámanes explained that he intended to expand the embassy's knowledge of "what was going on in Cuba."⁹² He also mentioned that his family was remaining in Mexico, so he would be making frequent visits. Freeman concluded that Pámanes had a "warm admiration" for the United States and would probably be amenable to sharing his observations on the Cuban situation during future informal meetings.

Fernando Pámanes Escobedo likely welcomed the excitement of espionage. A decorated army general and veteran of the Cristero rebellion, Pámanes had served as a military attaché—and seen action—in Mexico's embassy in China during the Second

⁹¹ Morley, *Our Man in Mexico*, 214. Historian David Kaiser has speculated that Silvia Durán might have been one of the CIA's penetration agents inside the Cuban Embassy. David E. Kaiser, *The Road to Dallas: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 274.

⁹² "[Freeman-Pámanes lunch]," March 30, 1965, RG 59 (State Department), Entry P2, ARC 602903, Box 2, U.S. National Archives.

World War.⁹³ He was disinclined to follow diplomatic protocol in his new posting in Cuba. A summary of his activities in the files of the foreign ministry put it well: “Ambassador Pámanes, during his mission in Cuba, undoubtedly guided by the best intentions, proposed to undertake intelligence work.”⁹⁴ On multiple occasions, the foreign ministry warned the ambassador to refrain from activities outside those prescribed for his position, but he persisted.

Ambassador Pámanes sought out numerous sources for sensitive information about Cuba. He exchanged letters with anti-Castro groups and provided them with cameras to photograph Mexicans receiving guerrilla training on the island.⁹⁵ He interviewed a Cuban intelligence agent who sought asylum in Mexico about his employer and its schools for guerrilla warfare.⁹⁶ Pámanes cultivated another official seeking to leave the island, Dr. Yamil Kourí, the former director of the Cuban Center of Scientific Investigations and Castro’s personal physician. Dr. Kourí told the ambassador he had information on numerous topics, including attempts to construct a nuclear reactor, plans to infiltrate Latin American universities, weapons contraband, foreign scientists who worked on the island, and Fidel’s relationship with the communist old guard in Cuba. The doctor also knew intimate details about Castro’s health, diet, and residence.⁹⁷ The

⁹³ Fernando Pámanes Escobedo, “Datos biográficos del C. General de División DEM Fernando Pámanes Escobedo,” February 26, 1965, Leg. III--2940, SRE. On the Cristero Rebellion, see Jean A. Meyer, *La Cristiada*, 3rd ed. (Mexico: Siglo veintiuno editores, 1974); Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico’s Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927-29* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁹⁴ “Expediente de Fernando Pámanes Escobedo,” March 23, 1971, Leg. III—2940, SRE.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “Dirección General de Inteligencia,” May 1966, SPR—540—BIS5, SRE; Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, “[information from a man exiled in the Mexican embassy in Cuba about leftist activity in Mexico],” April 2, 1966, DFS, Exp. 12-9-66, Leg. 17, Hoja 69, AGN.

⁹⁷ Fernando Pamanes Escobedo, “Kouri, Yamil H. (Dr.),” July 1, 1966, Leg. III—5866—4, SRE.

Mexican foreign ministry instructed Ambassador Pámanes to cease questioning Dr. Kourí for fear of endangering his petition to the Cuban government for safe conduct.⁹⁸

Fulton Freeman's hunch that Ambassador Pámanes would share his information with the United States proved correct. On at least one occasion, the Mexican official met with Francis Sherry, a CIA agent working under cover in the U.S. embassy. Pámanes told Sherry about political unrest in Cuba and the mobilization of thirty thousand troops along the southern coast in preparation for possible hostilities with Venezuela. He also described the unloading of what appeared to be Soviet ground-to-air missiles in the port of Mariel. A memorandum of the meeting circulated among officials in the CIA, the State Department, and the White House.⁹⁹

Ambassador Pámanes Escobedo's questionable activities eventually caught up with him. According to an internal investigation conducted by Mexico's foreign ministry, the ambassador accepted bribes for asylum, helping refugees and exiles smuggle their possessions of value off the island. He also trafficked in Cuban cigars.¹⁰⁰ By 1967, Castro had become so frustrated that he refused to cooperate with Ambassador Pámanes and

⁹⁸ Dr. Kourí remained in the Mexican embassy in Havana for six years and seven months, waiting for the Cuban government to approve his request for safe conduct to Mexico. In May 1972, he voluntarily renounced the protection of the Mexican government and turned himself over to Cuban authorities. Ernesto Madero, "Caso del Dr. Yamil Kouri," December 7, 1978, Leg. III—5866—4, SRE. After several years in Cuban prison, Kourí was freed in 1979 and found a position working in Harvard's Institute for International Development. In 1999, he was convicted of heading a group of conspirators that embezzled over two million dollars of federal funds meant for AIDS research in Puerto Rico. *United States vs Pagán Santini* (United States Court of Appeals, First Circuit 2006).

⁹⁹ Francis Sherry, "Conversation Between Embassy Officer and Mexican Ambassador to Cuba," June 12, 1967, RG 59 (State Department), CFPF 67-69, POL Cuba-A, U.S. National Archives.

¹⁰⁰ "Pámanes Escobedo Informe", July 24, 1967, File SPR-540-Bis 5, SRE.

suspended the repatriation of U.S. citizens.¹⁰¹ Pámanes lost his post, and a new ambassador, Miguel Covián Pérez, took his place.¹⁰²

Pámanes's departure did not mark the end of U.S. attempts to use the Mexican embassy for intelligence purposes. In 1968, the Mexican foreign ministry created a new post of press counselor and attaché in its embassy in Havana. Humberto Carrillo Colón, the man who filled the post, was an undercover CIA agent on a mission to gather political, economic, and military information about Cuba. He also kept an eye on Mexico's embassy and its ambassador, Miguel Covián Pérez. The CIA provided special photographic and radio equipment to monitor military objectives. Carrillo Colón used the official diplomatic mailbag to send his film and reports to the CIA station in Mexico City.¹⁰³

Outraged, Cuban leaders risked endangering their relations with Mexico by publicly denouncing Carrillo Colón. In September 1969, Cuba's ambassador to Mexico presented Foreign Minister Antonio Carrillo Flores with a diplomatic note condemning the CIA's spy. Cuban foreign minister Raúl Roa flew to Mexico to deliver "indisputable proof" of Carrillo Colón's activities to President Díaz Ordaz.¹⁰⁴ He demanded that the Mexican government extradite Carrillo Colón to Cuba for trial. Díaz Ordaz refused, and

¹⁰¹ "[Repatriation of American citizens now being held in Cuba]," September 15, 1967, National Security Files, Cuba, Bowdler File, Volume III (2 of 2), LBJ Library.

¹⁰² "Covián en La Habana," *Política*, August 15, 1967.

¹⁰³ *El insólito caso del espía de la CIA bajo el manto de funcionario diplomático de la Embajada de México en Cuba* (Havana: Granma, 1969).

¹⁰⁴ "Cuba Gives Spy 'Proof' to Mexico," *The Washington Post*, September 13, 1969; "Roa of Cuba Flies to Talk with Díaz: Castro's Foreign Chief Sees Mexican President 2 Hours," *New York Times*, September 13, 1969.

the spy, who had been recalled to Mexico after the Cubans had blown his cover, remained free.

The controversy continued after Foreign Minister Roa returned empty-handed. The official mouthpiece of the Cuban government, *Granma*, published a 164-page booklet titled *The Unusual Case of the CIA Spy under the Guise of Diplomatic Officer of the Mexican Embassy in Cuba*. Carrillo Colón gave an interview to the Mexican newspaper *El Universal* in which he publicly denied all the accusations.¹⁰⁵ Mexican journalists speculated that the CIA had masterminded the whole incident—including the disclosure—in order to cause friction between Mexico and Cuba.¹⁰⁶ Publicly, the mystery remained just that, but a classified history of the CIA's Mexico City station confirmed a decade later that Humberto Carrillo Colón was indeed an undercover agent.¹⁰⁷

The CIA, ever resourceful, knew how to make the best of a potentially bad situation. U.S. intelligence agents turned Mexico's defense of Cuba to their advantage. They built personal relationships with Mexican leaders and other officials in order to gain their cooperation in efforts to monitor Cuban activities. They collected a vast amount of information on Castro and his collaborators in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States. In the world of spies and subterfuge, the Mexican connection with Cuba proved invaluable.

¹⁰⁵ Jorge Aviles R., "Raúl Roa Vs. James Bond," *El Universal*, October 8, 1969.

¹⁰⁶ Horacio H. Quiñones, "[Article about Humberto Carrillo Colón]," *Buro de Investigación Política*, September 15, 1969 in IPS Caja 2958 D, AGN; Manuel Buendía, *La CIA en México* (Mexico City: Ediciones Océano, 1984), 211-212.

¹⁰⁷ Goodpasture, "Mexico City Station History."

CONCLUSION

Mexico's relations with Cuba in the decade after the Cuban Revolution posed a unique challenge for U.S. policymakers. According to the traditional Cold War calculus of zero-sum games, what was good for Castro should have been bad for Washington. Yet, U.S. leaders were insightful enough to realize that all three countries could benefit from the bridge that Mexico's policy represented.

This realization came neither easily nor quickly. Some U.S. officials, especially Ambassador Thomas C. Mann, repeatedly pushed the Mexicans to break relations with Cuba. Mann and others tried to use diplomatic leverage like delaying state visits and even considered applying economic pressure. These efforts met with limited success. Mexican leaders proved willing to budge on some aspects of their relationship with Cuba, but refused to alter what they described as the foundations of their foreign policy. They maintained their defense of self-determination and non-intervention.

However, Mexico's leaders also stayed true to another core of their foreign policy: alignment with the United States in times of crisis. Though they spent most of their time publicly celebrating their defense of juridical principles and their resistance to U.S. domination, Mexican leaders stood beside their neighbors to the north when real danger threatened. The Cuban Missile Crisis forced the Mexican government to reveal its fundamental loyalties.

In addition to demonstrating their allegiance in times of crisis, Mexican leaders convinced their U.S. counterparts that maintaining relations with Cuba protected Mexico's domestic stability. Observers in the CIA and State Department confirmed their arguments that the Cuban issue could prove dangerously divisive. Given the popularity of Castro and such supporters as Lázaro Cárdenas, the Mexican government could not justify taking the double risk of alienating the entire left wing of the population and

giving the assorted groups on that wing a common cause. U.S. leaders agreed: Mexico's domestic stability took top priority.

Policymakers in Washington also noted the gap between the style and the substance of Mexico's relations with Cuba. At the same time that Mexican leaders publicly opposed the OAS's economic sanctions against Castro, they quietly stopped importing Cuban goods. While Mexican officials allowed air travel to and from Cuba to continue, they also instituted strict controls over that travel and secretly shared passenger logs and photographs with the CIA.

In fact, the Central Intelligence Agency benefitted enormously from Mexico's relations with Cuba. Cuba's embassy in Mexico City and the Mexican embassy in Havana became espionage hotspots soon after Castro's revolution. The CIA cultivated Cuban officials, some of whom gave detailed intelligence to the agency upon defection. U.S. agents also used other methods to collect information about Cuba, including wiretaps, mail intercepts, and photographic surveillance. Mexican officials cooperated extensively in these efforts, demonstrating in yet another way that their public defense of Cuba had little to do with their actual loyalties.

U.S. leaders' approval of Mexico's ties with Cuba demonstrates flexibility and pragmatism—qualities that few scholars ascribe to Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson in the literature on Cold War relations between the United States and Latin America. Instead of using their political and economic power to force Mexico to cooperate in their campaign against Castro, the White House, State Department, and CIA all agreed instead to cooperate with Mexico's policy. Understanding this decision adds a new dimension to the story of inter-American politics in the Cold War.

Conclusion

At the end of July 1964, the Organization of American States' Ninth Meeting of Foreign Ministers captured the attention of the Mexican nation. This gathering in Washington D.C. would decide whether all members of the OAS would unite as a hemisphere-wide bloc in opposition to Fidel Castro. Mexico, one of only four countries that maintained relations with Cuba at the time, resisted pressure to join. "Our victory is in the imperturbable observance of our principles and in the constant invigoration of our democracy," the Mexican representative declared to the OAS assembly as his country refused to cut its ties to Cuba.¹

The Mexican government used its mouthpiece newspaper, *El Nacional*, to broadcast its foreign policy to domestic audiences. "We Will Not Attack or Defend Any Government," headlines blared.² Editorialists praised the "international nobility" of their country's position.³ Political cartoons showed the Mexican flag bringing a message of peace to a war-torn world and an indigenous warrior bearing a shield with the initials of the Organization of American States emblazoned across the front (see Images 7.1 and 7.2).

¹ "Intervención del representante de México en la IX Reunión de Cancilleres de la OEA," *Política*, August 1, 1964.

² "No vamos a atacar ni a defender a ningún gobierno"--Sánchez Gavito," *El Nacional*, July 19, 1964.

³ José Muñoz Cota, "Nobleza internacional de México," *El Nacional*, July 20, 1964, sec. Editorial. See also "México lucha por la dignidad de los pueblos," *El Nacional*, July 22, 1964, sec. Editorial.



Image 7.1: A political cartoon about Mexico defending the world from nuclear war in the OAS meeting of foreign ministers. The caption at the bottom reads: “Mexico’s pacifist policy has been put into action in proposing concrete measures to avoid the threat of a catastrophic nuclear war.” Source: *El Nacional*, July 22, 1964.



Image 7.2: A political cartoon of an indigenous warrior defending the principles of the Organization of American States. The caption at the bottom reads: “For Mexico, the letter and the spirit of the charter of the OAS embody the universal principles that the nation has made its own and would like to see all the people of the earth adopt.” Source: *El Nacional*, July 18, 1964.

El Nacional celebrated the domestic benefits of Mexico's foreign policy. "All Mexicans Are With the Government in the Case of the OAS," one headline declared.⁴ Other front-page articles described support for the government's Cuba policy on the part of workers, intellectuals, bureaucrats, and lawyers.⁵ One reporter characterized the country's position in the OAS as the "express mandate of the people."⁶ The coverage of the OAS meeting in the pages of *El Nacional* conveyed the impression that Mexico's foreign policy was so "unobjectionable" that the entire country had united around it.⁷

El Nacional's assessment of the domestic climate was correct: broad swathes of the population celebrated Mexico's policy toward Cuba. In a message to the head of Mexico's OAS delegation, ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas wrote that the "just interpretation of Mexico's international policy... deserved the unanimous support of the people."⁸ He sent similar letters to President López Mateos and to the foreign minister.⁹ Intelligence agents reported that the National Liberation Movement circulated a

⁴ "Todos los mexicanos están con el gobierno en el caso de la OEA," *El Nacional*, July 19, 1964.

⁵ "Respaldo a la política del régimen," *El Nacional*, July 29, 1964; "Pleno apoyo a la posición del gobierno," *El Nacional*, July 19, 1964; "Se exaltó el patriotismo de la obra del Presidente López Mateos," *El Nacional*, July 29, 1964; Luis Ernesto Cardenas, "Se le da la razón a México en su política internacional," *El Nacional*, July 30, 1964; "Adhesión de los empleados de la SSA a la política internacional mexicana," *El Nacional*, July 25, 1964.

⁶ "No vamos a atacar ni a defender a ningún gobierno"--Sánchez Gavito."

⁷ Fedro Guillen, "La inobjetable posición de México", July 18, 1964, sec. Editorial.

⁸ *Epistolario de Lázaro Cárdenas* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1975), 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 153, 155.

document praising Mexico's position in the OAS.¹⁰ Leaders of the Independent Campesino Center and the People's Electoral Front wrote letters to the press and the president.¹¹

Many of these same groups held demonstrations to show their support for the government's foreign policy. Nearly two thousand people gathered in a theater in Mexico City to repudiate the OAS and show their dedication to Castro. A speaker from the National Liberation Movement praised the Mexican government's "virile defense of the Cuban people." A leader of the communist party used the same evocative language when he told the audience members that they should support the government of López Mateos for its "virile and independent attitude in the meeting of ministers." Even muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who had been recently released after spending nearly four years as a political prisoner, congratulated the government on its foreign policy.¹²

Journalists from the premier leftist magazine *Política* compiled quotes from Mexico's leading citizens in order to show the widespread approval of their government's OAS stance. Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, one of the founders of the National Liberation Movement, affirmed: "This is how a government can win the support of its people."

¹⁰ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Se informa en relación con el Movimiento de Liberación Nacional," August 7, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-6-64, Leg. 12, Hoja 324, AGN.

¹¹ "Apoyo al presidente," *Política*, July 15, 1964; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Se informa en relación con el Frente Electoral de Pueblo," July 23, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 11, Hoja 9, AGN; "[FEP letter to López Mateos about OAS meeting]," July 29, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 11, Hoja 72, AGN.

¹² Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Mitin de apoyo a Cuba," July 26, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 11, Hoja 22, AGN; "Distrito Federal: Mitin en el Teatro 'Lírico,'" July 26, 1964, IPS Caja 444, Exp 2, AGN; "Por México y por Cuba," *Política*, August 1, 1964. On Siqueiros's imprisonment and release, see "Siquieros en libertad," *Política*, July 15, 1964.

Journalists, lawyers, businessmen, bankers, industrialists, revolutionary veterans, petroleum workers, campesinos, intellectuals, poets, senators, congressmen, governors, students, and teachers all expressed their support for Mexico's foreign policy.¹³

A leader of the People's Electoral Front captured the significance of his country's stance in a presentation entitled "Why Mexico Did Not Vote Against Cuba." He told his audience that they should not be grateful to the Mexican representative in the OAS for refusing to vote against Cuba, but instead should "thank the diverse social sectors in the country that forced the government to act in this manner."¹⁴ In one sentence, the speaker explained both the creation and the importance of Mexico's policy toward Castro.

The Mexican government maintained relations with Cuba in response to pressure from the domestic Left. Castro's revolution inspired groups and individuals across the Americas to organize and demand more from their governments. People like former president Lázaro Cárdenas saw it as a sign that the time had come to reinvigorate the Mexican Revolution. He and others hoped that by defending Cuba, they could help spread Castro's reforms to their own country.

Mexican leaders became extremely concerned about this increase in leftist activism. Their intelligence agents fed their fears, submitting hundreds, even thousands of reports about dangerous groups and individuals. Security officials told Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz that Cárdenas could challenge their authority on the battlefield

¹³ "Unidad nacional," *Política*, August 1, 1964; "Solidaridad con el gobierno," *Política*, August 15, 1964.

¹⁴ Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Frente Electoral del Pueblo," August 6, 1964, DFS, Exp 11-141-64, Leg. 11, Hoja 83, AGN.

and in the ballot boxes. Intelligence agents watched as the former president inspired new leftist organizations like the National Liberation Movement, the Independent Campesino Center, and the People's Electoral Front. They also noted the mounting activism among workers, journalists, and peasants.

Mexico's leaders feared that leftist groups and individuals could undermine and overthrow the government. Like authorities across the Americas, they perceived internal subversion as the greatest threat to national security. Intelligence agents created the impression that communists and other leftists were trying to topple the government. Armed uprisings and the constant danger of student activism added to the climate of fear. After witnessing the success of Castro's revolution, Mexican authorities could not afford to take internal threats lightly.

The Mexican government responded to the leftist threat with a combination of repression and concession. Authorities jailed agitators, harnessed the media, crushed strikes, and manipulated elections. When they encountered especially vocal opposition, as in the cases of Rubén Jaramillo and the 1968 student movement, Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz resorted to violence. But they also used other means to minimize leftist activism. Knowing that enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution united leftists, Mexican leaders used their foreign policy to curry favor among several potential opponents at once.

This tactic had the desired effect: it helped maintain internal stability. Defense of the Cuban revolution was a cause around which the disparate leftist groups could have united, had López Mateos or Díaz Ordaz cut relations with Castro. Instead, the two

presidents turned that threat into an opportunity and used their ties with Cuba to ingratiate themselves with same people who could have been dangerous opponents. Such political maneuvering was one of the factors that enabled the Mexican government to retain its remarkable record of stability throughout the turbulent years of the Cold War.

The power dynamic was not unidirectional. By making relations with Cuba a tool of internal control, Mexican leaders opened their foreign policy to domestic influence. Leftist groups and individuals used their organizational capacity to influence their country's international relations. Their conferences, rallies, propaganda, publications, and communications sent an unmistakable message of support for Castro. Their desire to defend the Cuban Revolution united them, and their unity on that particular issue gave them strength.

Foreign influences played a lesser role in shaping Mexico's policy toward Cuba. Castro's use of Mexican territory to export revolution gave the country's leaders cause for alarm. U.S. presidents and diplomats tried to push their southern neighbors to cut ties with the island. If external influences had determined Mexico's policy, then Castro's meddling and U.S. officials' pressure probably would have pushed Mexican leaders to cut relations with Cuba. The fact that they maintained their ties in the face of external coercion lends further weight to the argument that domestic considerations took top priority.

The other participants in the trilateral relationship had their own reasons for protecting the unique bridge between Mexico and Cuba. For Castro, it provided an important symbolic and physical connection to the outside world. The Cuban embassy in

Mexico City, as well as the consulates and Prensa Latina offices, became crucial nodes of Castro's international web of subversion and intrigue. This web became entangled with a similar one emanating from the United States. CIA agents used Mexico's ties with Cuba to their advantage, collecting information on Castro and his associates. The White House and State Department encouraged Mexican leaders to keep their foot in the door with Cuba for the purposes of negotiating such sensitive issues as repatriation.

This dissertation on the domestic and international aspects of Mexican foreign policy makes a revisionist contribution to the literature on inter-American relations. It builds on efforts to challenge narratives that portray the United States as the determining factor in Latin America's Cold War. This dissertation shows that Washington's foreign policy could be quite flexible, even in its own backyard. Aware of the domestic pressures on Mexico's foreign relations, Kennedy and Johnson adjusted their campaign against Castro according to Mexican needs. Instead of pushing López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz to cut ties with Cuba, the White House, State Department, and CIA used the relationship to their own advantage.

This project also has broad implications for the field of Mexican history. It demonstrates that the government was neither as powerful nor as secure as many historians have claimed. Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz had no way of knowing that their party would retain control of the country for the rest of the century. All they knew was what they read in the intelligence reports, and what they saw concerned them. In the decade after the Cuban Revolution, leftist groups and individuals appeared to pose a significant threat.

This analysis of the domestic influences on Mexico's relations with Cuba suggests fruitful directions for further research. It demonstrates the need for more work on the relationship between the Mexican state and civil society. To what extent and in which moments was the Mexican state authoritarian? In what other ways has Mexico's foreign policy contributed to—or endangered—domestic stability? This project also raises questions about U.S. relations with Latin America. Were there other situations in which the internal needs of one country influenced U.S. policy toward a third party? How determined *were* U.S. leaders to unseat Castro? Finally, it suggests the benefits of further examinations of the connections between foreign and domestic politics.

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