

A FOREIGN POLICY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION

Mexico's Lukewarm Defense of Castro, 1959–1969

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Abstract: This article brings new evidence and a revisionary argument to the debate over Mexico's exceptional relations with Cuba in the decade after the Cuban Revolution. It uses recently declassified Mexican intelligence records to show that Mexican leaders defended Castro primarily because they were afraid of domestic leftist groups and individuals. The first part of the article examines the intelligence information that Mexican decision makers received about internal threats, drawing out the connections that they perceived between Cuba and the Mexican left and the reasons they designed their foreign policy for domestic ends. The second section shifts to the international level, challenging the traditional arguments that foreign or ideological factors determined Mexico's policy toward Cuba. It examines the ways that Mexican leaders defused and negotiated against possible repercussions from Cuba or the United States as a result of their decision to maintain relations with Castro's government.

In the summer of 1960, Mexico welcomed Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado in an official state visit. Mexican president Adolfo López Mateos met Dorticós at the airport in Mexico City, where a crowd of thousands cheered and waved colorful banners. In a speech that contained numerous comparisons between the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) 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” (Barra et al. 1988, 83–84). López Mateos's apparent enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution waned as Castro radicalized his regime, but his outspoken defense of Cuba's right to self-determination and nonintervention remained constant.

Mexican leaders' foreign policy toward Cuba increased their country's role in the Latin American theater of the Cold War. In July 1964, the member nations of the Organization of American States (OAS) resolved to cut all diplomatic and economic ties with Cuba. Mexico was the only country that flatly refused to comply with the resolution. From 1964 to 1970, Mexico was the sole Latin American nation to maintain diplomatic relations and air contact with Cuba, and it served as a crucial link between Castro and the rest of the hemisphere.¹ Mexico became an im-

For their guidance and assistance, I thank Jonathan Brown, Ann Twinam, Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Mark Lawrence, Andrew Paxman, Ana Covarrubias-Velasco, Gastón Martínez Rivera, Cameron Strang, the Social Science Research Council, and the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Latin American Research Review*.

1. In 1970, Salvador Allende's Chile reestablished relations with Cuba.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 47, No. 2. © 2012 by the Latin American Studies Association.

portant thoroughfare for people, money, and contraband trade bound for or coming from Cuba. The Mexican government's tolerance of this semi-underground network challenged the OAS's efforts to isolate Castro and risked provoking retaliation from the United States.

Mexican leaders decided to defend Castro primarily because they were worried about leftist groups and individuals in their own country and believed that they could use their policy toward Cuba to minimize the domestic leftist threat. In the wake of Castro's success, Mexican authorities, like many others, overestimated the centralization, organization, and coordination of opposition groups, and in so doing, they gave those groups more influence over policy than their actual numbers or resources should have afforded (on the subject of perception and misperception of threat, see Jervis 1976; Knorr 1976; Stein 1988). Knowing leftists' dedication to the Cuban cause, Presidents Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964) and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970) used their country's special relationship with Castro to gain political capital and to buttress their own government's revolutionary credentials.

Previous work on Mexican foreign relations has overemphasized external and ideological explanations for Mexico's policy toward Cuba while underestimating domestic influences. One historiographic tradition has argued that Mexico's place in the international system determined its foreign policy in the 1960s (Smith 1970; Couturier 1975; Ojeda 1976; Domínguez and Lindau 1984; Buchenau 2002; Ojeda 2008). This line of reasoning postulates that Mexican leaders' fear of the United States and the ability of the United States to apply political and economic pressure drove Mexican policy decisions. Some of these scholars argue that Mexican leaders in the 1960s used their foreign policy as a mechanism of international communication, defending nonintervention on principle to preserve and affirm their own national sovereignty. Others have even asserted that the United States directly determined Mexico's foreign policy (Meyer 1992). Another canonical line of thought has argued that ideological principles played the most prominent role. Some scholars in this tradition echo the government's claims that strict adherence to the principles of self-determination and nonintervention guided Mexican foreign policy (Garcés Contreras 1982; Bobadilla González 2006). Others assert that sentiments of revolutionary or postcolonial solidarity inspired Mexican leaders to defend Castro (Loeza 1988; White 2007).

The political scientists Olga Pellicer de Brody (1972) and Ana Covarrubias-Velasco (1994, 1996) have given the greatest consideration to the role of internal factors. Pellicer contends that Mexico's policy resulted from a process of negotiation between the ideal precepts of international justice and pressure from interest groups within and outside of Mexico. Covarrubias-Velasco argues that both the Cuban and Mexican governments found close relations valuable for affirming the revolutionary and/or progressive nature of their regimes. Even Pellicer and Covarrubias-Velasco, however, assign greater importance to external and ideological influences, and 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. This analysis builds on their work and that of Kate Doyle (2003), using newly available sources to prove that domestic leftist activism did, in fact, shape Mexico's foreign relations with Cuba.

This article argues that the primary influence on Mexico's policy toward Cuba was neither foreign pressure nor revolutionary ideology, but rather Mexican leaders' deep-seated, paranoid fear of the domestic left. In 2002, the records of the Mexican Federal Police and the country's two most important intelligence organizations became available to researchers at the National Archives in Mexico City. Agents of the *Policía Federal*, the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (the Federal Department of Security, or DFS), and the *Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales* (the General Department of Political and Social Investigations, or IPS) submitted hundreds of thousands of pages of reports in the 1960s on the activities of domestic groups and individuals to their supervisor, the minister of the interior. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz served as Adolfo López Mateos's minister of the interior before succeeding him to the presidential seat. These two men played the key roles in deciding Mexico's foreign policy in the 1960s.² Although it is impossible to know for certain what they were thinking when they crafted Mexico's policy toward Cuba, the reports from the Mexican security forces provide a new window into their sense of danger (Aguayo 2001; Condés Lara 2007). The reports contain the information that Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz received from their most trusted sources about domestic threats to their control, and they reveal an alarmist portrayal of leftist activities. This is not to say that the information in the intelligence documents was "true" or reflected "reality," or that the presidents automatically believed everything their agents told them. Many of the claims in the reports were, indeed, false or exaggerated. However, López Mateos's and Díaz Ordaz's public and private actions and statements suggest that they believed much of what they read in the intelligence documents.

In addition to demonstrating the importance of domestic factors in Mexico's relations with Cuba, this article also uses declassified US government documents to counter the arguments that the United States shaped Mexican policy or that Mexican leaders sympathized with Cuba for ideological reasons. Records from the US State Department reveal that leaders in Washington initially wanted Mexico to break with Cuba and considered using economic and political leverage to compel their southern neighbors to cooperate. However, Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz refused to submit to US pressure and instead convinced their counterparts that it was in both countries' interests for Mexico to maintain relations with Cuba. Records from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) document intensive cooperation between US and Mexican intelligence agencies to monitor Castro's affiliates in both Cuba and Mexico. If Mexican leaders had really felt revolutionary or postcolonial solidarity with the Cuban cause, or wanted to defend the principle of nonintervention, they probably would not have cooperated as readily as they did with US efforts to weaken Castro's regime.

This article begins by analyzing the domestic influences on Mexican leaders' decision to maintain relations with Cuba. It examines the intelligence information that López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz had at their fingertips about internal threats to their control over the country, including former president Lázaro Cárdenas,

2. Scholars of Mexican foreign relations generally agree that in the mid-twentieth century, the president determined foreign policy (Brandenburg 1964; Stevens 1974; Couturier 1975).

leftist political organizations, campesino and union activism, and student unrest. In this manner, the first section of the article draws out the connections that Mexican leaders perceived between Cuba and the Mexican left, and the reasons they designed their foreign policy for domestic ends. The second section shifts to the international level, challenging the traditional arguments that foreign or ideological factors determined Mexico's policy toward Cuba. It examines the ways that Mexican leaders defused and negotiated against possible repercussions from Cuba and the United States as a result of their decision to maintain relations with Castro.

THE DANGERS OF THE DOMESTIC LEFT

Mexican leaders in the decade after the Cuban Revolution were very worried about the leftist threat to their control over the nation. They had seen the recent effects of political activism in Cuba, as well as in their own national territory fifty years earlier. President López Mateos and his minister of the interior and successor, Díaz Ordaz, had to make policy decisions based on the knowledge available. They collected information from their intelligence agents, the press, military officials, state governors, and other government functionaries. Their sources sent a consistent, alarming message: leftist groups and individuals were ready and able to jeopardize their hold over the country.

One of the greatest threats Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz saw to their control was Mexico's most popular former president, General Lázaro Cárdenas. President of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, Cárdenas was still one of the most powerful political personalities in the country twenty years after he left office. Thousands of workers and campesinos remembered the general's efforts on their behalf, and nearly all Mexicans celebrated his appropriation of the foreign-owned oil companies in 1938. The journalist K. S. Karol published an interview with the ex-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. . . . [I]f he sends out a new call to the people, as on the 18th of March 1938, the entire nation will follow him."³

When Cárdenas spoke out in favor of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, the Mexican nation—and government—listened. Cárdenas's earliest actions on Castro's behalf were crucial to the successful launching of the Cuban Revolution. After Mexican police arrested Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and the rest of their group in June 1956, and in so doing, jeopardized Castro's plans to continue his crusade against Fulgencio Batista, Cárdenas interceded with Mexican president Adolfo Ruiz Cortines to obtain their release (Castro Ruz 1985; Cárdenas 2003). Three years later, Cárdenas visited Havana on July 26, 1959, to celebrate the sixth anniversary of Castro's attack on Cuba's Moncada Barracks. Speaking in front of a crowd of thousands, including journalists from around the world, Cárdenas asked for moral support on Cuba's behalf. Afterward, the ex-president

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

spoke with the Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska on the airplane back to their country. He explained his sympathy for the difficulties that the Cuban leaders were encountering and reminisced about how Mexican revolutionaries had faced the same animosity, criticism, and false accusations earlier in the century (Poniatowska 1961).

Cárdenas took an even greater step in his efforts to defend Castro's government in March 1961, when he convened the Latin American Conference for National Sovereignty, Economic Emancipation, and Peace (or *Conferencia Pro-Paz*) in Mexico City. Cárdenas and the other organizers wanted to draw international attention to the impoverished living conditions in Latin America, to denounce imperialist activities in the region, and to defend the Cuban Revolution. By this time, Castro had signed a major trade agreement with the Soviets and had embraced Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev at a meeting of the United Nations, and the United States had cut relations with Cuba. The announcement of the *Conferencia Pro-Paz* declared: "We understand that the defense of Cuba is the defense of Latin America."⁴ The event brought together more than 2,500 delegates from across the hemisphere, including such important personages, as Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the president of the Federation of Cuban Women and Raul Castro's wife, Vilma Espín. It was among the most important international efforts to harness the momentum of the Cuban Revolution and extend its perceived achievements throughout Latin America.

Mexican intelligence agents took careful note as Cárdenas and the other delegates vowed to spread all aspects of the Cuban Revolution in their own countries. Cárdenas himself read the *Conferencia Pro-Paz's* incendiary resolutions before a crowd of ten thousand at the conference's closing ceremonies. The resolutions declared, "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."⁵

Cárdenas's peace conference worried government officials. Agents from both the DFS and IPS compiled hundreds of pages of reports on the event, which they submitted to Díaz Ordaz, then minister of the interior. A fifteen-page memorandum composed by IPS agents vividly conveyed the fear and hostility that Mexican government officials and security forces felt toward the *Conferencia Pro-Paz*.⁶ The author (or authors) of the report devoted a great deal of attention to Lázaro Cárdenas 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). According to the IPS agents, Lázaro Cárdenas was extremely powerful, popular, and dedicated to the "Fidelization of

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

5. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Conferencia Pro-Paz," March 8, 1961, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-61, bundle 3, folio 66, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter AGN).

6. *Conferencia Pro-Paz* documents, March 1961, IPS box 1475 B, file 40-43, AGN.

[Latin] America.” They spared no ink in their efforts to elucidate the threat that the former president could pose to the Mexican government if he so wished.

Little more than a month after the close of the peace conference, the US invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs prompted Cárdenas to enact his resolution to defend the Cuban Revolution. On April 17, 1961, as US-trained Cuban refugees attempted to land at Playa Girón, Lázaro Cárdenas drove to the airport in Mexico City to board a private plane to Cuba. Soldiers prevented Cárdenas’s airplane from taking off (Suárez 1987). President 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 the US attack. The general went from the airport to the *zócalo*—Mexico City’s main plaza—where a crowd of at least five thousand people, possibly as many as fifty thousand, gathered to hear him rail against the invasion.⁷ They squeezed around him, reaching out to touch his hand. Cárdenas 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. He 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.

Cárdenas’s denunciation of the Bay of Pigs invasion reached beyond the *zócalo*. He sent a scathing message 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*. “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 . . . to impede the aggression that our brother nation of Cuba is suffering,” Cárdenas declared.⁸ Intelligence agents collected copies of Cárdenas’s declaration and newspaper clippings about his 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.⁹ President López Mateos was not ignorant of the ex-president’s actions.

In addition to his defense of the Cuban Revolution, Cárdenas’s public statements about Mexican domestic politics fed one of the government’s greatest fears—that the general 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 the US

7. The head of the DFS estimated that five thousand to eight thousand people attended, whereas IPS agents put the number between forty thousand and fifty thousand. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [Cárdenas and Students Protest Bay of Pigs], April 18, 1961, DFS gallery 1, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, bundle 2, folio 168, AGN; Mitin Estudiantil, April 18, 1961, IPS, box 1980 B, AGN. Note: Many of the intelligence reports did not have titles—the descriptive titles in English are provided for organizational purposes. Writers for the magazine *Política* estimated that seventy thousand to eighty thousand people attended. “El país, con Cuba,” *Política*, May 1, 1961.

8. Cárdenas’s telegram to the United Nations about Cuba, April 17, 1961, DFS gallery 1, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, bundle 2, folio 165, AGN.

9. Ruben Fernández Millan, Ruben, [Vigilance outside of Cárdenas’s house during Bay of Pigs], April 17, 1961, DFS gallery 1, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, bundle 2, folio 166, AGN.

businessman and local landowner William O. Jenkins. 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."¹⁰

Numerous sources warned President López Mateos that Cárdenas's heated remark about a new revolution might not have been an idle threat. The president of the Partido Nacional Anticomunista (National Anticommunist Party, or PNA) accused Cárdenas of treason. He claimed that the ex-president convened a gathering in Uruapán, Michoacán, on March 18, 1961, to celebrate the anniversary of his nationalization of the oil industry. Cárdenas allegedly encouraged the crowd to overthrow the government and implant a totalitarian communist regime, following the example of such countries as Russia, China, and Cuba.¹¹ Other conservative leaders warned the president that Cárdenas was undertaking subversive activities and planning a violent, Cuban-style revolution. Agustín Navarro Vázquez claimed that the general traveled to Europe to receive instructions from communist leaders on how to facilitate Russia'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."¹²

Even if President López Mateos didn't put much store in unsolicited information from conservative ideologues, he was receiving similar reports from his intelligence services that Cárdenas was organizing subversive activities across the country. In April 1961, the head of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad wrote that Cárdenas was planning a nationwide protest against the government, to take place on May 1. According to the DFS report, the general was encouraging his followers to demonstrate during the International Workers' Day celebrations.¹³ The director of the intelligence services submitted another report a few months later with additional allegations of Cárdenas's subversive activities. He claimed that "the members of the Mexican Peace Committee [the group that organized the Conferencia Pro-Paz], who are led by General Lázaro Cárdenas, plan to carry out a campaign in various States of the Republic, agitating various social sectors."¹⁴ The intelligence director went on to name Puebla, Jalisco, San Luis Potosí, Michoacán, and Baja California as specific targets of Cárdenas's communist agitation.

Recent politically motivated violence and activism 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 supporters and critics following the Bay of Pigs invasion.¹⁵ Cárdenas had visited Jalisco and given a speech criticizing US president John F. Kennedy in a tour he led after the Conferencia Pro-Paz. Shortly after Cárdenas's

10. Eliseo Ibañez Gonzalez, "Cárdenas clamó contra latifundio y monopolio," *Excélsior*, June 8, 1960.

11. "Consignación del General Cárdenas a la Procuraduría," *Excélsior*, March 27, 1961.

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

13. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [Cárdenas leading communist protest against government], April 10, 1961, DFS gallery 1, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Rio, bundle 2, folio 163, AGN.

14. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Se informa en relación con el COMUNISMO," June 24, 1961, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-61, bundle 4, folio 52, AGN.

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

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 US consulate. In Michoacán, hundreds of students protested the US invasion of Cuba (Zolov 2004). In Baja California, protestors held a large demonstration in Tijuana, and the police and army arrested more than a hundred sympathizers of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁶

Intelligence agents' distrust of Cárdenas endured, and two years after the Bay of Pigs invasion, Mexican leaders were still receiving reports about the ex-president's subversive activities. Agents of the *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 police, "General Lázaro Cárdenas had told them to form brigades of armed campesinos in all of the States of the Republic, as well as here in the Distrito Federal, so that at the necessary moment they can confront the Army and the Police."¹⁷ This report and others from multiple intelligence services convinced President López Mateos and his chief administrator, Díaz Ordaz, that Cárdenas was willing and able to stir up a great deal of trouble if given the incentive.

Although Lázaro Cárdenas occupied much of the government's attention in the early 1960s, he was by no means the only domestic threat that Mexican leaders perceived. Another fear was that leftist groups and leaders would amass their power by creating a united organization independent of government control. Mexican leaders did not want to give leftist groups a cause to work together, and they knew that defense of the Cuban Revolution could be a rallying cry. As they watched over the *Conferencia Pro-Paz* in their own capital city, López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz heard people from across the country and hemisphere vow to work together to protect Castro's regime. Their agents, who monitored all national press, probably told them 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."¹⁸ During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the head of the DFS reported that the *Política* editorial had proved prophetic: Mexican Communist Party leaders were meeting with the head of the Popular Socialist Party, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, to organize a protest of the blockade that would bring together communists, socialists, unionized workers, and students.¹⁹

Government leaders' fears of leftist cooperation began to materialize with the formation of the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Movement, or MLN) in 1961. Participants in the *Conferencia Pro-Paz*, including Lázaro Cárdenas and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, formed the MLN to enact the conference's resolutions. Their goals encompassed electoral transformation, rejection of North American imperialism, economic emancipation of campesinos and

16. "El país, con Cuba." *Política*, May 1, 1961.

17. Jefatura de *Policía del DF* Secretaría Particular, [Lázaro Cárdenas organizing a peasant army], September 6, 1963, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-63, bundle 10, folio 264, AGN.

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

19. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [Leftist protest of Cuban Missile Crisis], October 25, 1962, DFS gallery 1, file 11-2-62, bundle 10, folio 239, AGN.

workers, agricultural reform, and defense of the Cuban Revolution. The members of the MLN 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. They held educational sessions and demonstrations, distributed pamphlets, hung posters, and published their own 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 committees across the republic.²⁰ The head of the movement, Alonso Aguilar Monteverde, claimed that the MLN had more than three hundred thousand members in 600 committees.²¹

The MLN's greatest claim to power was its connection to Lázaro Cárdenas. The former president spoke at the foundational meeting of the movement, exhorting the audience members to unite and defend their interests in an organization that would help achieve the postulates of the Mexican Revolution.²² *Política* published an interview with Cárdenas, in which he avowed: "I am in complete solidarity with the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, and I will be as long as I live."²³ The general delivered the closing address before a thousand people at the MLN's first national convention in October 1963, declaring that the movement 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."²⁴

Government leaders felt threatened by the MLN, and just as they had with Cárdenas, they called for heavy surveillance of the movement's members. Intelligence agents monitored their mail, telegrams, and telephones.²⁵ They collected samples of MLN posters, flyers, press bulletins, and newspapers. They assembled lists of people who attended meetings or made financial contributions to the organization.²⁶

Government leaders and their agents feared the MLN 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 one another, rather than in competition, they could begin to undermine the government's power over campesinos, workers, and other groups. They could foment subversion and rebellion. Government agents watched uneasily as members of the MLN and others began to take just such steps.

Mexican leftists began forming a new agrarian organization in 1963, the Central Campesina Independiente (Independent Peasant Center, or CCI). Ever since

20. Hector Fierro García, [MLN meeting], July 10, 1962, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-62, bundle 7, folio 178, AGN.

21. Author interview with A. Aguilar Monteverde, leader of the MLN from 1961 to 1965, February 24, 2010, Mexico City.

22. "La nación: Liberación nacional," *Política*, August 15, 1961.

23. Roberto Blanco Moheno, "Comunista: Una palabra que no debe espantarnos," *Siempre!*, December 13, 1961.

24. "El MLN se reúne," *Política*, October 15, 1963.

25. For examples of surveillance, see DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-62, bundle 6. More evidence of phone tapping is available in MLN leader Jorge L. Tamayo's letters to the DFS (Tamayo 1986).

26. "Personas que apoyan al MLN," November 14, 1963, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-63, bundle 11, folio 143, AGN.

Lázaro Cárdenas's time as president, the peasantry had formed one of the main pillars of the government's power. The government-run Confederación Nacional Campesina incorporated the rural class into the official state party (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) and kept them within the sphere of government control. The CCI attempted to end the peasantry's subordination and reinvigorate the agrarian aims of the Mexican Revolution. In January 1963, more than a thousand people from across the country, claiming to represent five hundred thousand campesinos, gathered in Mexico City for the CCI's constitutional congress. Their call to the nation exhorted the campesinos to seize control of their own destinies. The group 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."

The announcement of the new campesino organization's formation inspired 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."²⁷ They claimed that many of the speeches at the group's convention were subversive and frank challenges to the national government. Many of the CCI's critics directed their venom at Lázaro Cárdenas, the symbolic head of the organization. An editorial in *Excélsior* contended that as the chief organizer of the Confederación Nacional Campesina, Cárdenas was betraying his legacy by supporting the new campesino group.²⁸ Ex-president Emilio Portes Gil warned Cárdenas that he was destroying his own prestige, claimed that he was attacking President López Mateos, and called him "an instrument of international communism."²⁹

The government's intensive surveillance of the CCI reveals Mexican leaders' fear that the new campesino organization could threaten their control over the peasantry. A nine-page report on a campesino meeting in Coahuila by General Francisco Ramírez Palacios in the Ministry of National Defense is particularly illustrative. According to Ramírez Palacios, one of the speakers told the 150 people assembled that "the CCI is an organization of combat, as it has demonstrated in the states of Guanajuato, Sonora, Baja California, Jalisco, Yucatán, and others, where it has defeated the authorities and the enemies of the peasantry."³⁰ Another campesino leader contrasted the Mexican government's expenditures of public monies to widen the Avenida Reforma in Mexico City with the Cuban government's support of agriculture. A third speaker 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 foretold the overthrow of the government and the installation of a socialist republic, a mission, he claimed, that the CCI was born to fulfill. One of the national leaders of the new

27. "Trampa comunista para campesinos: Futurismo político prosoviético," *Excélsior*, January 8, 1963. "La nueva Central Campesina, guiada por Cárdenas, se perfila como partido político," *Excélsior*, January 7, 1963.

28. Luis Chavez Orozco, "Cárdenas, negación de sí mismo?" *Excélsior*, January 11, 1963.

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

30. General Francisco Ramírez Palacios, [CCI meeting], November 9, 1963, IPS box 2851 A, AGN.

organization, Ramón Danzós Palomino, reportedly swore to lead the campesinos in arms against the “bourgeois government.”

Other members of the government’s security services corroborated General Ramírez Palacios’s assessment that the CCI was dangerous. Agents of the DFS attributed land invasions to CCI leadership and reported on their efforts to provide legal defense for imprisoned campesinos.³¹ Security officials also read the group’s mail and told their superiors about meetings and other contact between Lázaro Cárdenas and leaders of the organization.³² The intelligence that López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz received about the group corroborated what they read in the press: it was a communist-dominated organization determined to undermine the government’s control over the campesinos.

As was the peasantry, the working class was an important pillar of the Mexican government that threatened to crumble in the decade after the Cuban Revolution. Lázaro Cárdenas, along with labor leaders Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Fidel Velázquez, had dealt with the rising tide of labor activism in the 1930s by incorporating most workers into the government machine under the umbrella of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers). The confederation was a single, national union that looked to the government as the arbiter of labor disputes and the regulator of industry. Beginning in the 1940s, the government also managed to install in most unions *charro* leaders, whose loyalties lay with those in power rather than with the workers. 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 railroad workers, traditionally the most powerful and militant group, were the first to challenge President López Mateos. Frustrated with their low salaries, meager benefits, and *charro* leaders, they began organizing in 1958 around Demetrio Vallejo. Fidel Castro sent a telegram to Vallejo in 1959, congratulating him on his early victories. The railroad unionist pulled the Syndicate of Railroad Workers out of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos and ordered a nationwide strike on Easter Sunday in 1959. The government responded by arresting ten thousand railway workers, including Vallejo. In spite of the repression of the railway workers, other labor groups staged their own strikes without permission from the government. Othón Salazar and Encarnación Pérez, leaders of the Revolutionary Teachers’ Movement, held numerous strikes and demonstrations among the educational sector. Taxi drivers, bus drivers, telegraphers, airline pilots, and telephone operators followed suit. President Díaz Ordaz faced a strike movement among medical residents and interns immediately upon entering office in 1964.

Although many of the workers in reality had concrete goals—higher wages, better benefits, and above all the right to independent unions—government

31. [List of invasiones de tierras], February 29, 1964, DFS gallery 1, file 11–136–64, bundle 4, folio 290, AGN; Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [CCI efforts for arrested campesinos], October 31, 1963, DFS gallery 1, file 11–136–63, bundle 4, folio 73, AGN.

32. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [CCI letter to Cárdenas], October 30, 1963, DFS gallery 1, file 11–136–63, bundle 4, folio 70, AGN.

leaders and their agents saw other, more insidious explanations for union activity in the 1960s. They suspected that the communists, the Cubans, and MLN members were encouraging the workers to destabilize the government. The head of the DFS connected a 1962 general strike in Baja California to the MLN. He claimed that movement leaders had traveled to Mexicali and spoken to more than six hundred agricultural workers of the United Industries of California. They reportedly encouraged the striking workers to join their organization and told them that the MLN supported their efforts.³³ Agents of the DFS claimed that the movement was giving support to and recruiting members among petroleum workers and the striking doctors, as well. One report maintained that the doctors' strike was secretly directed and financed by leaders of the Mexican Communist Party and the MLN.³⁴

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. When a Cuban delegation traveled to Mexico in February 1959, two thousand railroad workers, electricians, teachers, and other independent union members held a celebration in the visitors' honor.³⁵ During Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós's visit 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. . . . Cuba shows us, with her example, the path to the true and effective solution to the most grave of [our] problems," the workers declared.³⁶ On July 26, 1961, six hundred students, railroad laborers, and teachers—followers of Demetrio Vallejo and Othón Salazar—gathered in the state of Durango to celebrate the anniversary of Castro's assault on the Moncada Barracks.³⁷

Finally, the student sector caused Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz a significant amount of worry and grief. The Mexican student movement of the 1960s had its roots in strikes at the Politécnico and the National Autonomous University in 1956, but it also drew much of its inspiration from the Cuban Revolution. As did other leftist groups in Mexico, students saw Castro's government as an example of a truly liberated, revolutionary regime. They sought both to emulate the Cuban Revolution and protect it. Demonstrations in favor of Cuba mobilized large groups of students, especially in Mexico City. Thousands gathered to denounce the Bay of Pigs invasion in states across the country. As many as eighty thousand students went to Mexico City's zócalo to hear Cárdenas's protest, one thousand took to the streets in Puebla, and ten thousand demonstrated in the state of Mexico.³⁸ Hundreds of students from the Colegio de San Nicolás de

33. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, [MLN links with strikers in Mexicali], September 21, 1962, DFS gallery 1, file 100-2-1-62, bundle 7, folio 111, AGN.

34. [MLN organization of the doctors' strike], February 2, 1965, DFS gallery 1, file 11-6-65, bundle 14, folio 43, AGN.

35. Manuel Rangel Escamilla, "Homenaje a la delegación cubana con sindicatos mexicanos," February 16, 1959, DFS gallery 1, file 12-9-1959, bundle 3, folio 150, AGN.

36. "Bienvenido a México!" *Excelsior*, June 9, 1960.

37. Francisco Ramírez Palacios, [July 26 celebration in Durango], July 28, 1961, IPS box 2964 C, AGN.

38. "El país, con Cuba," *Política*, May 1, 1961.

Hidalgo in Morelia, Michoacán, sacked the Mexican-US Cultural Institute and burned its books and papers (Zolov 2004). Even after the excitement surrounding the Bay of Pigs invasion died down, Mexican students remained dedicated to the Cuban cause. In 1966, agents of the Federal Judicial Police reported that a meeting in celebration of July 26 attracted 2,500 people, mostly students.³⁹

López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz feared that Mexican students' admiration of the Cuban Revolution would not stop with public demonstrations and meetings. Their intelligence agents submitted frequent reports about students traveling to Cuba for guerrilla training.⁴⁰ They also claimed that young members of the Mexican Communist Party were receiving classes on guerrilla warfare in Mexico.⁴¹ One DFS agent claimed that communist students in Cuernavaca, in cooperation with the MLN and the CCI, planned to dynamite a statue that the government had erected of campesino activist Rubén Jaramillo after soldiers assassinated him and his family. The destruction of the statue would be timed to disrupt Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's presidential campaign visit to the city.⁴²

In 1968, at the height of the student movement, government leaders and their intelligence agents struggled to understand if and how the Mexican students were connected to Cuba. A report compiled by the DFS in August 1968 listed the participants in the youth movement, along with their political affiliations and activities.⁴³ Some people on the list had reportedly traveled to Cuba, others were admirers of Fidel and Che (one student even wanted to rename the library of the political science department at the National University after Guevara), and still others received books and magazines from the Cuban embassy. Another DFS report about the student movement claimed significant Cuban involvement.⁴⁴ The author of the report asserted that the president of the Mexican Communist Party had called the Cuban embassy to report that he was carrying out the student agitation. The DFS agent also claimed that Fidel Castro had multiple friends among the leaders of the youth movement. Other student leaders allegedly received communications and instructions from the Cuban embassy. Police interrogated leaders of the student movement and asked them numerous questions about Cuba.⁴⁵ They demanded to know the origin of signs that students carried on August 27, 1968, that read "A Man: Castro. An Island: Cuba. An Ideal: Communism." They

39. Policía Judicial Federal, [Cuban Revolution anniversary celebration, July 26, 1966], gallery 3, GDO 206 (125), AGN.

40. [Guerrilla training in Cuba], June 9, 1967, IPS box 2966 B, AGN. Antecedentes de Marco Antonio Goytia Jiménez, 1968, IPS box 2892 A, AGN.

41. Policía Judicial Federal, [Communist guerrilla training], June 2, 1966, gallery 3, GDO 205 (124), AGN; [PCM providing guerrilla training in Mexico], August 6, 1966, DFS gallery 1, file 11-4-66, bundle 18, folio 21, AGN.

42. Agent No. 631, [Report on planned agitation and acts of sabotage], May 30, 1964, DFS gallery 1, Versión Pública de Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, bundle 3, folio 148, AGN.

43. "Relación de estudiantes que pertenecen a diferentes grupos políticos radicales y que continúan agitando en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México," August 5, 1968, IPS box 2942, AGN.

44. [People involved in student protests], August 19, 1968, DFS gallery 1, file 11-4-68, bundle 32, folio 23, AGN.

45. "Interrogatorio de Heberto Castillo Martínez," June 27, 1969, IPS box 2956, AGN.

also asked who instructed the students to hang posters bearing the portraits of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro on the walls of the National Palace.

Mexican leaders, however, never publicly accused the Cuban government of involvement with the student movement, despite the doubts they privately harbored. Instead, they resorted to vague references to international conspiracies and foreign participation. Immediately after the massacre of scores of students by government troops on the night of October 2 in the Plaza de Tlatelolco, the head of the Federal Police told the press that the nature of the weapons collected in the plaza suggested "an international conspiracy geared toward planting terror and unhinging public order."⁴⁶ The senate also blamed "foreign" influence.⁴⁷ Members of the government clearly wanted to blame the student movement on influences outside of Mexico, and Castro's revolutionary, communist government would have been the perfect scapegoat. The fact that Mexican leaders chose not to blame Cuba proves that they had at least one very good reason for maintaining relations with the island.

That reason was fear of the domestic Mexican left. Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz were convinced of at least two things in the 1960s: first, that internal leftist groups and individuals, including Lázaro Cárdenas, the MLN, the CCI, unionized workers, and students, posed a significant threat to the government's control over the country; second, that the very same groups were dedicated to the defense of the Cuban Revolution. López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz could cut relations with the island and give the leftist groups a rallying banner, plastered with Che's steely visage, under which to unite forces, or they could maintain relations and gain leverage with their domestic critics. They opted for the latter.

CAUGHT BETWEEN WARRING NEIGHBORS: MEXICO, CUBA, AND THE UNITED STATES

Although Mexican leaders predominantly feared domestic threats to their regime when they crafted their nation's policy toward Cuba, they also had to take international factors into account. Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz found their country caught in a potentially dangerous position, between two neighbors at war. They managed to turn the situation to their advantage, however, and used their relations with Cuba to placate both the domestic left and Castro himself while at the same time engaging in back-room negotiations with US leaders to convince them to cooperate with their decision.

Mexico's maintenance of relations with Cuba helped shore up internal political stability not only by co-opting one of the left's causes but also by discouraging Castro from including Mexico among the targets for his worldwide revolutionary campaign. Ever since Castro's Second Declaration of Havana in February 1962, the Cuban government had openly pursued a policy of encouraging armed

46. Héctor Almazán, "Criminal provocación en el mítin de Tlatelolco causó sangriento zafarrancho," *El Nacional*, October 3, 1968.

47. Luis Ernesto Cárdenas, "Declaración de la Gran Comisión del Senado sobre los recientes disturbios habidos en la capital," *El Nacional*, October 4, 1968.

revolution throughout Latin America. Castro vowed to assist violent insurrectionary movements across the hemisphere and provided arms, money, and training to numerous groups. The 1964 OAS resolution only increased Castro's determination to spread his style of revolution among the nations that contributed to Cuba's isolation.

However, Castro took great care to note Mexico's exemption from his insurrectionary campaign. When he denounced the 1964 OAS resolution in his Declaration of Santiago de Cuba, Castro carefully excluded Mexico, announcing, "With the government of Mexico, we are disposed to commit ourselves to maintaining a policy subjected to norms, inviolable norms of respect of the sovereignty of each country."⁴⁸ In 1985, the Cuban leader reiterated his commitment to nonintervention in Mexico, telling a reporter from *Excelsior*: "everything that has to do with Mexico, for me, is a matter that I always treat with great respect, with great care, and with as much delicacy as possible" (Castro Ruz 1985). Castro portrayed his relationship with the Mexican government as reciprocal: each one respected the other and refrained from interfering in the other's business.

An additional reason that Mexico maintained relations with Cuba is because the US government eventually endorsed its decision to do so. Mexican leaders secretly negotiated with their northern neighbors over their country's relations with Castro. Some US officials, such as Thomas C. Mann, ambassador to Mexico from 1961 to 1963, initially argued that the United States should pressure Mexico to take a hard line on Cuba and communism. Mann sent a series of telegrams to the US secretary of state in June and July 1961, suggesting that the United States should make it clear that approval of loan requests would hinge on Mexico's efforts to contain communism.⁴⁹ In December of the same year, the ambassador recommended delaying President Kennedy's visit to Mexico until President López Mateos agreed to modify Mexico's defense of Cuba in the OAS.⁵⁰ Mann and others in the US government wanted to use their country's significant economic and political leverage to force Mexico to join the fight against Castro and communism.

Mexican leaders refused to submit to US pressure. They argued that taking an open stand against Cuba would endanger their own country's political stability. In January 1961, President López Mateos engaged in a frank conversation with CIA chief Allen Dulles about Castro and communism.⁵¹ The president compared their two countries' positions, arguing that the United States could view the Cuban problem as one of international character, as there was little chance of Castroism having an internal effect in the United States. Mexico, in contrast, contained a large body of sympathy for Castro and his revolution, which, López Mateos

48. 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.

49. Thomas Mann, "Connecting loans to anti-communist actions," July 17, 1961, National Security Files, Countries, box 141, JFK Library.

50. Thomas Mann, "Mexico's OAS position," December 6, 1961, Papers of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., White House Files, Classified Subject File, WH-41, JFK Library.

51. 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, US National Archives, College Park.

explained, forced him to consider Castroism a problem of internal security. He told Dulles that he “had to weigh the factor of Mexican sympathy for Castro in all decisions concerning Cuba.” The Mexican president told the CIA director that, for that reason, he could take no overt action to overthrow Castro. It is possible that López Mateos was feigning fear about domestic stability to gain a better bargaining position with the United States, but the analysis of Mexican intelligence documents in the first part of this article suggests that the president’s concerns were genuine.

President López Mateos refused to take an open stand against Castro; however, he was willing to cooperate on a covert level. In the same conversation with Dulles, the president claimed that he would personally like to see the communist Cuban regime overthrown and replaced with a democratic system. He told the CIA chief that there were many things that the Mexican government would be willing to do “beneath the table.” Specifically, López Mateos agreed to assist the CIA’s efforts to “disrupt and hamper” Lázaro Cárdenas’s upcoming Latin American peace conference and to share all of his intelligence groups’ information about communism.

Mexican leaders’ efforts to convince their US counterparts to accept Mexico’s public defense of Cuba worked. During a telephone conversation on November 12, 1964, Secretary of State Dean Rusk advised President Lyndon B. Johnson not to belabor the Cuba issue with Mexican president-elect Díaz Ordaz. Rusk told Johnson: “During our foreign ministers meeting in late July, a number of us—Brazil and others—talked about the practical desirability of having one Latin American embassy [in Cuba] if possible.”⁵² The top official in the US State Department described Mexico’s connections to Cuba not as dangerous, or merely tolerable, but desirable.

The same day that Secretary Rusk advised President Johnson to avoid pressing the Cuba issue, president-elect Gustavo Díaz Ordaz explained to Johnson the nuances of Mexico’s foreign policy and its relationship to the United States. He confided that there “was considerable advantage when the issues at stake were not great if Mexico could continue to demonstrate its political independence and divergence. . . . While divergence on relatively unimportant matters might at times create temporary discomfiture they also demonstrated that the American States did in fact enjoy independence.”⁵³ Díaz Ordaz conveyed to Johnson that Mexico’s stance was to both countries’ advantage. It demonstrated that the United States was not an international bully and allowed the Mexican government to display its autonomy.

Leaders in the United States came to an agreement with their Mexican counterparts regarding the Cuba issue. In 1967, the deputy chief of mission at the US embassy in Mexico referred in a telegram to an “informal understanding” between

52. Telephone conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Dean Rusk, November 18, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Recordings of Telephone Conversations, White House Series, tape WH6411.18: Dean Rusk, 9:40 a.m., PNO 6342.

53. Memorandum of Conversation: Mexican-Cuban Relations, November 12, 1964, Country File, NSF, box 61, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

the governments of Mexico and the United States.⁵⁴ He had learned on arrival at his post that officials “at the highest levels” in both countries agreed that Mexico should “maintain relations with Cuba so one OAS country can have [a] foot in [the] door which might sometime be helpful.” Rusk’s statement to President Johnson and the deputy chief’s telegram to the secretary of state both indicate that policy makers in the Johnson administration actually embraced Mexico’s decision to defy the 1964 OAS resolution.

The main way that the United States profited from Mexico’s connections with Cuba was improved access to information. Exactly as President López Mateos had explained to Dulles, Mexico’s relations with Cuba offered the United States unique opportunities to collect intelligence on Castro and his affiliates. The Mexican ambassador to Cuba from 1965 to 1967, Fernando Pámanes Escobedo, was one important source of information. Pámanes provided US embassy official Francis Sherry with sensitive information about political and military developments in Cuba. In a top-secret meeting in June 1967, Pámanes discussed the mobilization of thirty thousand troops along Cuba’s southern coast and reported that he had observed a Soviet ship unloading long, large boxes in the Cuban port of Mariel. He surmised that the boxes contained surface-to-air missiles.⁵⁵ A summary of Pámanes’s activities in his file at the Mexican Foreign Ministry states: “From various documents, it can be seen that Ambassador Pámanes, during his mission in Cuba, proposed, undoubtedly guided by the best intentions, to undertake intelligence work.”⁵⁶

Recently declassified documents prove that Mexican officials at the highest levels approved of and facilitated the CIA’s surveillance of Cubans on Mexican soil. The CIA used the code name LITEMPO for a spy network that the chief of the Mexico City station, Winston Scott, began building in 1956 and kept his numerous contacts confidential by assigning numbers to each (Morley 2008). In an operational report from November 1963, a CIA agent reported, “When LITEMPO/2 becomes the presidential candidate, some changes may be necessary.”⁵⁷ The future presidential candidate to whom the agent referred was Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Two other top Mexican officials—the director of the DFS from 1964 to 1970, Captain Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, and Díaz Ordaz’s minister of the interior and successor, Luis Echeverría—also participated in Scott’s spy network.⁵⁸ The CIA’s close ties with top Mexican government officials aided the efforts of both countries to limit Castro’s ability to use Mexico as a springboard for his hemispheric revolutionary campaign.

54. Henry Dearborn, telegram from Henry Dearborn to the Secretary of State, June 28, 1967, RG 59 (State Department), CFPF 67–69, POL Cuba-A, US National Archives, College Park.

55. Francis Sherry, Conversation between Embassy Officer and Mexican Ambassador to Cuba, June 12, 1967, RG 59 (State Department), CFPF 67–69, POL Cuba-A, US National Archives, College Park.

56. General de División Fernando Pámanes Escobedo, March 23, 1971, file III-2940, Archive of the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City.

57. Willard C. Curtis, LITEMPO Report, November 7, 1963, RG 233, box 90, reel 46 JFK/CIA RIF 104–10211-10102, US National Archives, College Park.

58. Jefferson Morley connected the pieces to identify Díaz Ordaz, Gutiérrez Barrios, and Echeverría as LITEMPOs 2, 4, and 8, respectively.

Mexican-US intelligence cooperation was so extensive that the Mexican government helped a CIA agent infiltrate its embassy in Cuba. In September 1969, the Cuban newspaper *Granma* published the 164-page booklet *The Unusual Case of the CIA Spy under the Guise of Diplomatic Officer of the Mexican Embassy in Cuba (El insólito caso del espía 1969)*. The authors alleged that Mexico's Foreign Ministry had created a new post in its embassy in Cuba specifically for the use of CIA agent Humberto Carrillo Colón. They claimed that Carrillo Colón carried out his mission for a year and a half, until the Cuban ambassador in Mexico officially denounced him in a letter to the Mexican foreign secretary. The Mexican government brushed off the ambassador's letter, declaring it "unacceptable."⁵⁹ Mexican leaders never handed over Carrillo Colón, and the Cuban government eventually accepted their decision. An internal history of the CIA's Mexico City station confirmed, nearly a decade later, that Carrillo Colón was, in fact, a US intelligence agent.⁶⁰

The Mexican government's cooperation with the US campaign against Castro suggests two conclusions. First, it helps disprove the theory that Mexico maintained relations with Cuba out of revolutionary solidarity. If Mexican leaders had truly sympathized with Castro's revolutionary efforts, they probably would not have cooperated so thoroughly in sharing information about his government with his enemies in the United States. Second, US leaders' acceptance of the Mexican's decision to maintain relations with Cuba indicates that they decided that the United States had higher priorities than the creation of a unanimous pan-American front against Castro. The US leaders realized that Mexico's support of Cuba was more rhetorical than practical and that, when it really mattered, Mexico would stand beside them. In addition, government officials in the White House and members of the CIA saw Mexico's connections to Cuba as a means of intelligence collection, and they seized the opportunity.

CONCLUSION

Mexican leaders had to make a difficult decision when they found themselves in the middle of the Cold War battle between Cuba and the United States. Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz knew that by maintaining diplomatic relations with Cuba, they were establishing Mexico as a major thoroughfare for Castro's quest to spread revolution, and risking political and economic retaliation from the United States. However, these potential problems posed little danger to the Mexican government itself. Castro's gratitude toward Mexico discouraged him from backing significant revolutionary activities in the country and instead made him complicit in supporting Mexico's domestic stability. Furthermore, although some officials in the US government initially questioned Mexico's connections to Cuba, Mexican leaders refused to submit and were able to convince their US counterparts that both countries could benefit from the maintenance of Mexican-Cuban relations.

59. "Desacato cubano," *Tiempo*, September 22, 1969.

60. Anne Goodpasture, Mexico City Station History, November 16, 1978, RG 263 CIA Russ Holmes Work File, box 22 RIF 104-10414-10124, US National Archives, College Park.

The determining factor in the Mexican government's decision to maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba was the internal political situation. Mexican intelligence agents painted a frightening picture of domestic leftist activism, and judging from their response, Presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz listened. Lázaro Cárdenas's actions and the creation of new leftist organizations added to the perceived threats of labor and student unrest. Cutting relations with Cuba could potentially unite the disparate leftist groups and individuals in opposition to the government's foreign policy, whereas maintaining relations could win political capital for the regime and help shore up its revolutionary image. Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz crafted their country's lukewarm defense of Castro with these considerations in mind, thus creating a foreign policy for domestic consumption.

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