

Reagan, de la Madrid seek cooperation against drugs

by Nancy Spannaus

The kidnaping of a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) official, which initially led to a serious worsening of relations between the United States and Mexico, may end up providing the basis for a "new beginning" in U.S.-Mexican relations. Cooperation between the two nations in the war on drugs could take relations between the two countries out of the hands of Secretary of State George Shultz and former Treasury Secretary Don Regan—who seek to destroy Mexico by imposing IMF conditionalities—and put them in the hands of law enforcement officials who see eye to eye on the drug issue.

Presidents Ronald Reagan and Miguel de la Madrid held an "extremely cordial and friendly" telephone conversation on the evening of Feb. 22, according to reports widely circulated in the Mexican press. A press communiqué issued by the presidential palace in Mexico, Los Pinos, states that de la Madrid told Reagan that the border inspection "is causing serious damage to relations on both sides of the border. The measure is not the most appropriate way to fight drugs."

President de la Madrid stressed his commitment to fight drugs and proposed that the Attorneys General of both countries meet soon in order to work out ways of increasing cooperation against the drug traffickers. President Reagan expressed his agreement to de la Madrid's proposal.

While the meeting date has not yet been set, its chances of success may now be improved following the confirmation of Edwin Meese as U.S. Attorney General. Meese is widely reported to have received the fullest and broadest mandate from President Reagan to expand the war on drugs.

The first signs of an improvement in U.S.-Mexican relations—which have been deteriorating drastically since the summer when Ambassador John Gavin publicly flouted his support for the Nazi opposition party, the PAN—came soon after the de la Madrid-Reagan phone call. A meeting between Gavin and de la Madrid resulted in an improvement in Gav-

in's approach (see below). The two countries also collaborated in handling the arrests of four former Mexican police officials, suspected of being involved in the kidnaping of DEA official Enrique Camerena Salazar.

The four officials, including a former officer whose duties included heading the security detail for Henry Kissinger during his visits to Mexico, were apprehended on Feb. 25. Three of the four were released the next day due to insufficient evidence, and only booked on lesser charges which allow them to be released on bail. Unlike the previous week, however, the Mexican and U.S. governments did not trade hostile charges over the incident. The release of the former officers occurred after close consultations between the two governments, with the U.S. agreeing with the Mexicans that there was insufficient evidence at hand.

The 1975 model

There is a recent model for collaboration between the two countries on the drug problem, a model built by the Ford and Echeverria administrations of 1975. At that time, Mexico was providing over 80% of both the heroin and marijuana coming into the United States, and, as today, the political machine which controlled the drug cultivation was beginning to pose a major security threat to Mexico itself.

On the recommendation of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the United States and Mexico undertook Operation Trizo (Tri-Zone). Under this operation the U.S. worked with Mexico to initiate a program of massive eradication and interdiction of the drug traffic. Most importantly, Mexico received from the United States the training and equipment to conduct pinpoint plotting of areas under drug cultivation with infrared and multispectral photography, remote sensors, and airborne radar technologies. Such technologies allowed Mexico to use herbicides and defoliants without threatening neighboring food crops.

Armed with this new technology, and political support, President Echeverria combined the forces of the federal police and the Mexican army to carry out Operation Condor in mid-1976. During the period of September 1975 to August 1976 tens of thousands of fields of poppies and marijuana were wiped out. Major organized crime gangs were busted up, and thousands of traffickers put in jail.

Equally important, President Echeverria initiated a policy of expropriating lands which had belonged to those latifundists who were growing drugs rather than food.

The Mexican war on drugs continued under the administration of President José Lopez Portillo, and on the level of the DEA, the cooperation between the United States and Mexico continued. Three technicians from NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, were loaned to Mexico to design an aerial photographic system for detection of small plots. The result of that experiment was to give Mexico the capability of using ultramodern airplanes with detection systems similar to those used by Skylab.

The Mexican anti-drug program continued to be quite successful until it was hit by the ravages of the new depression, ravages which have been greatly aggravated by the conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund. The new areas of drug growth have been particularly in the north of the country, especially those areas which are the stronghold of the PAN.

Obstacles to cooperation

It is the U.S. support for the IMF which is the greatest obstacle to a new era of cooperation between the two countries on the drug issue. As has been shown in country after country, the austerity imposed by the IMF and the IMF's demands for cash crops which will allow the subject nation to pay its debts systematically leads to the growth of the predatory drug trade.

Thus a competent drug eradication program must include the elimination of IMF conditionalities for Mexico, and U.S. collaboration in building up the water and energy infrastructure necessary for American-style agriculture in our southern neighbor.

The second major obstacle to U.S.-Mexican collaboration is the dominance of the policy nexus around Henry Kissinger. Kissinger was virtually given the policy franchise on Mexico when President Reagan appointed him head of his Bipartisan Commission on Central America. Kissinger's program? Use the Central American hotspot as a means of making a New Yalta deal with the Russians, and moving in to occupy any country in the area that resisted his Malthusian economic policies and becoming new Hong Kongs.

Part and parcel of the Kissinger policy is the set of contingency plans to provoke a U.S. invasion of Mexico. This outlook, which U.S. administration support for the PAN promotes, continues to enjoy support in circles around the

administration. A recent opinion column by British intelligence agent Cord Meyer in the *Washington Times* retailed such a line. If we could intervene in Mexico in response to a social explosion there, Meyer wrote, then the President could have the full support of the population for doing anything that he wanted to do in Central America.

It is this kind of advice, and such advisers, whom Mexico may rightly suspect of using the problems of drug traffickers in Mexico as an excuse for attacks on Mexican national sovereignty. But if the Reagan administration proceeds to rule its relations with Mexico by eliminating all those policies which enhance conditions for the drug pushers, it can't go wrong.

Documentation

Mexico fights the drug mafia

Excerpt from opening statement by Mexican Attorney General Garcia Ramirez at a press conference Feb. 22.

[The drug mafia] attacks in many ways: by intimidation, by pressure, through threats. . . . They try to bribe people, buy consciences. . . . And they also attack through rumors or doubts, rumors or doubts which, intentionally or not, deliberately or not, lead to the discrediting of that which is worthy of credit and of those who are facing the problem. They are creating confusion and divisions which benefit, above all, the drug-runners. It is the delinquents who reap the benefits of division, of disunity, or of confusion.

We . . . are not interested in [blaming the United States as a market], because in those other markets there are human beings, there are children, adolescents, youths who deserve to be protected, whose health must be safeguarded. Mexico is carrying out an intense struggle in its own territory in order to prevent health problems in other territories. This is a commitment that Mexico has contracted, and that it will continue to fulfill for ethical reasons as well as international solidarity.

We are party—and furthermore, we fulfill our part—to the international conventions against narcotics and psychotropic drugs. We have a clear relationship, open, dignified, and honorable, with numerous countries, most particularly with the United States of America. The relationship which we have with the U.S.A., which is not hidden or obscure, but clearly open and cordial—as it has been and we hope that it will continue to be—is a relationship whose characteristics proceed from the conditions of both countries and their proximity, customs, and special signs which rate it as an honora-

ble relationship, clearly recognized in Mexico and the United States, which consists in mechanisms of reciprocal support and exchange of information.

I want to highlight one more time that in order to deal with the international lawlessness which crosses borders, the action needed to combat it should transcend borders. And it does transcend borders, but it does it with respect for national sovereignty, with attention to the autonomy and the competence of each one of the countries. That has been our relationship with the North American agencies, that has been the relationship of the North American agencies with Mexico. We propose that it continue as it is.

Excerpts from newspaper supplement published Feb. 24 by the Mexican Attorney General.

The permanent fight of Mexico against narcotics must be emphasized more and more each time. This campaign, in which both the Attorney General of the Republic and the army are participating—will continue until not a single plant of marijuana or poppy is cultivated on the national territory.

Specifically, in the period stretching from the 10th of December, 1982 to the 20th of February, 1985, the army and the Mexican air force destroyed 136,927 poppy plants and 80,747 marijuana plants.

On the other hand, in this same period the production of 118,282.80 kilograms of opium gum and 8,836,926 of marijuana was stopped, all of which was occupying an area of 26,656.49 hectares.

In this same campaign, the army and the Mexican Air Force have captured 642 land vehicles, 14 airplanes, 7,674 fire arms, and 7,907.77 tons of packaged marijuana. . . .

It is possible to enumerate that in this operation, the army and air force maintain a requirement for a total of 25,000 men, of whom 15,000 are actually directly in action against these illegal hectares, by means of constantly flying overhead in the mountain range, as well as checkpoints of control; the other 10,000 are troops which in the rearguard provide the logistical support and administrative necessities for the completion of this mission. . . .

Gavin press conference

In a press conference for the Mexican and foreign press Feb. 27, U.S. Ambassador John Gavin gave extensive details on his conversation with President Miguel de la Madrid concerning the kidnaping of a DEA agent by drug traffickers. Second level secretaries of government, the foreign ministers, and the attorneys general also participated. Gavin remarked that in recent days, "we have seen more energy in the investigation, we sincerely hope that this will continue thus. The attorney general and the President have given us every kind of guarantee."

The English-language Mexican daily *The News* reported

that Gavin "said that while the President and his cabinet are sincere in their efforts to solve the kidnaping, police corruption at lower levels might hamper the investigation. 'Certain proofs of lack of vigor and lack of cooperation might simply be the tip of the iceberg,'" he said.

Gavin noted the deep concern of Mexican authorities "about corruption at certain levels in their law enforcement agencies," and their difficulties in solving the problem. The president is aware of these problems, Gavin said, and "is the first who would want to stamp them out."

The problem, Gavin continued, is the massive amount of money that drug traffickers have at their disposal. "The problem also is that they are not above threatening and killing people. The combination of bribery and intimidation is extremely strong. We have to sympathize with the situation, but we have to fight against it."

Gavin noted that "the eradication effort has certainly picked up" in Mexico. "Our government believes that President de la Madrid is an honest and upright man. We have faith in him, we have hopes for his program, we wish it well."

On the other hand, Gavin spoke about the blockade on the border and pointed out that despite the fact that they have not succeeded in finding any information leading to locating Camerena, "he does not wish to say that this operation was not necessary to be carried out. It was decided upon because it is necessary to do everything possible. We cannot be critical of this action. Responsible departments on both sides of the border agreed that there would be difficulties, but they were in agreement that the fight against the drug traffic and the mafiosi is a price we are required to pay."

Gavin was asked why the Mexican government was not informed of the decision to carry out this operation, and he pointed out that "this embassy was never informed ahead of time" either. He explained that the United States government is very vast and very diverse "and with due respect this measure was taken in the territory of the United States, and my government has jurisdiction over it."

Gavin also reported that, on the express request of the ambassador, the attorney general of the republic had decided to create an office dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of crimes against the United States.

This was denied by a spokesman for the attorney general. The spokesman, interviewed by *Uno Mas Uno*, indicated that such a decision would require creating a special office for every country. "I hate to contradict Mr. Gavin, but that is a lie," he said.

It was also reported in *Uno Mas Uno* that Gavin said that "the druggushers have a grip on the entire world. It is a dirty business. It is known that the gangs here are connected with the Colombians, with Nicaragua and Cuba, who offer them asylum, with groups from Miami and New Jersey and sometimes with those from the southeast, El Paso. and southern California."