

México-Estados Unidos: Entre la cooperación y el desacuerdo analyzes one of the most complex and difficult periods of contemporary Mexico-U.S. diplomatic relations: the years between 1982 and 1988. Walter Astié-Burgos explores the bilateral relationship not only through his experience as a participant in Mexico's diplomatic mission in the United States, but also with the help of opinions and evaluations of various political figures who, in either country or another, played a leading role during their careers.

Astié-Burgos reviews the great changes in the world during the 1980s: the rising tensions between Washington and Moscow, the problems in Central America, the complex Mexico-U.S. relations and their intricate agenda and the conservatives taking office in the United States. All this constituted the frame of reference for the problems we confronted, and in many ways determined the course of our diplomatic relations.

In a context like that, the bilateral agenda in those years was especially complex. The general difficulties revolved around five main areas: different points of view on the Central American dilemma, diverse issues of multilateral diplomacy, drug trafficking, migration and the rising debt.

Regarding Central America, Astié-Burgos states that one of the substantial disagreements during the time was rooted in the fact that U.S. "conservative politicians" conducted their foreign policy with the goal of preventing the "advance of communism." Based on this, the U. S. government sought all possible means, including the military preparation of the Nicaraguan Contras, to avert the victory of communism in Central America. Meanwhile, the Mexican government, based on its principles of foreign policy and fully aware of how counterproductive war would be for the country, sought a peaceful solution in Nicaragua through dialogue, negotiation and the formation of the Contadora Group.

According to Astié-Burgos, disagreements arose not only because of the different visions but also due to the conduct of Mexican diplomats in the multilateral arena: the conservatives criticized them for repeatedly voting against the U.S. proposals in the various multilateral fora.

By contrast, however, the author emphasizes that cooperation did take place, especially in the field of economics and on issues such as drug trafficking and migration in which, beyond isolated tensions, understanding prevailed.

In the field of the economy, Astié-Burgos says that not only was the foreign debt, which by the end of 1982 came to U.S.\$91,000, successfully renegotiated, but sectorial agreements were also made with the United States to complement the gradual economic opening in accordance with national and international conditions.

The author notes that despite the assassination on Mexican territory of Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena, "By the end of the period, cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking had improved without commitments that could potentially damage national sovereignty," such as the ones the more conservative wing of the Reagan government had at one time pushed for.

With respect to migration, the violation of human rights of Mexicans living in the United States were included on the bilateral agenda.

Based on the above, Walter Astié-Burgos leads us to conclude that, in reality, this stage of bilateral relations was no more or less distressing than any other. From 1982 to 1988, the traditional common denominator of our bilateral relations was, in effect, maintained: moments of significant cooperation and understanding, combined with others marked with strife and friction. According to the author, however, "What one can consider a distinct feature of the period were the noticeable, acute differences between the two governments." This was due to public debate, repeatedly voiced criticism, indirect messages and extensive information through the media, etc.

For the author, what should be emphasized is that, despite the tremendous external and internal complexities, in the end the essential relations were not harmed: with notable pragmatism and an deep sense of responsibility when faced with important vested interests that impeded progress, understanding was sought and achieved when most needed. In the midst of disagreements, bilateral cooperation continued to be a priority. ■■■

Esther Ponce Adame
International relations specialist

Translated by Dianne Pearce