

This point should not be under-estimated, because there have been several points in recent years—the 1968 massacre by Mexican armed forces of student protestors, the brutal repression of revolutionary groups in the state of Guerrero, and the widespread abuse of human rights after the 1994 uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas—all of which represented opportunities for fraternal support from Havana. Instead Cuba deliberately ignored requests for support by these groups and refused to participate in domestic Mexican politics. Yet again the creed of “non-interventionism” in the affairs of another country was extremely important.

The non-interventionist policy is of course closely related to the issue of sovereignty, and for Mexico this has traditionally been a fundamental plank in its foreign policy. Mexico is therefore grateful that Cuba—which had supported guerrilla groups in a number of Latin American and African countries in the 1960s and 1970s—never did so in Mexico. This is worth noting, since basic socio-economic injustices in Mexico were (and are) manifest. Since the eruption of political difficulties in Chiapas in 1994, the Cuban government has been consistently muted in its criticism of flagrant human rights abuses there, seeing this as an issue which the Mexicans need to resolve themselves. (This position was undoubtedly appreciated in Mexico. However, as we have seen, the arrival of the Fox government led to a radically new position by the Mexican government—and for the first time to criticism of the human rights situation in Cuba. Understandably this frustrated Havana, which has still refrained from pointing the finger at abuses in Mexico—although critical Cuban press references to are increasingly common).

There is also a commercial factor in which Mexico is profoundly interested in its relationship with Cuba. Mexico also has gained solid economic benefit from its relationship with Cuba, and its commercial connections—notably in pre-NAFTA ties—were solid indeed. Mexico is now keen to secure niche markets for post-Castro Cuba, and is concerned that it not lose ground to expected US investment there. It is also concerned with its dependence upon the United States as its principal trading partner, and in general is keen to diversify its trading dependency. Finally, it is keen to maintain the relation in order to maintain some bargaining power and thereby secure the estimated \$US300 million in debt owed it by Cuba.

Finally, and although this might at first appear a rather bizarre claim, both Mexico and Cuba need each other's support—or at least a passably cordial relationship. Despite protestations about Cuba's poor human rights record in civil and political rights, Cuba remains in many ways the conscience of Latin America. Its record of international solidarity (particularly visible in its internacionalista medical brigades in a dozen Latin American countries, but also in its superb sports records and reputation as one of the continent's cultural superpowers) have led to a grudging (and often not so grudging) respect in many areas of Latin America.

The recent election of Lula to the presidency in Brazil, the promise of closer ties with Brazil, Venezuela and—to a lesser extent—Argentina, Paraguay and Ecuador, as well as ongoing good relations with the Anglophone countries in the Caribbean, augur well for Cuba's relations with its neighbours. Admittedly, as was the case in the Human Rights Commission in Geneva in April of 2004, several Latin American countries voted against Cuba. That said, even among