

automatically accepting an even stronger dependency upon the United States.

How did this dramatically new stage in Mexican-Cuban relations play out? With great drama, several surprises, and eventually almost with a rupture of relations established fully a century ago. There was a major sea change under the Castañeda tenure in foreign affairs, summarized well by his bold claim pregnant with symbolism that "The relations with the Cuban revolution are now finished. By contrast Mexican relations with the Republic of Cuba are now started"⁷ In making this claim Castañeda was rejecting out of hand the status quo which had been in effect since 1959, and was taking Mexico into uncharted waters. What was clear, though, was that Mexico under the influence of Castañeda and Fox, notwithstanding the diplomatic assurances of President Fox to the contrary, now saw Cuba as an expendable ally. In 2001 history was made in the bilateral relationship when Mexico for the first time ever abstained on a U.N. vote condemning the human rights situation in Cuba (In the past it had always sided with Cuba, claiming that non-intervention was essential). In 2002, while Castañeda was still Minister, Mexico went further, adding its voice to a condemnation of Cuba. This trend has continued in 2003 and 2004.

Jorge Castañeda served Mexico as Foreign Minister for just over two years. In general his tenure cannot be viewed as successful, and he caused difficulties with several Latin American neighbours. In terms of his dealing with the Cuba file there are no successes to report. There were, however, several embarrassing incidents, and a track record of increasing friction between Mexico City and Havana. His claim in Miami to Cuban-Americans that the doors of the Mexican embassy in Havana were open to all Cubans is seen by some as the principal cause of a bus being commandeered and smashed through the gates of the diplomatic compound as some 20 Cubans (unsuccessfully) took this opportunity to seek political asylum.

His much-publicized feud with Mexican Ambassador to Cuba Ricardo Pascoe (significantly a PRD member) resulted in a distasteful witch-hunt of the highly regarded ambassador, and ultimately his resignation. Castañeda's official edicts that Mexican Independence Day not be celebrated in Cuba in 2002 (in theory because of budget reductions), and that Mexican diplomats not attend Cuban commemorative functions to celebrate this anniversary, were particularly petty. The meeting of President Fox with Cuban dissidents in Havana in February 2002 also was not helpful. In sum, the two years with Castañeda at the helm of Mexican foreign policy brought few rewards for the country—except for improved relations with Washington; from the perspective of Mexico-Cuba relations they were an unmitigated disaster.

The Council on Hemispheric Affairs in an insightful commentary has levelled two related criticisms at Castañeda's role as Foreign Minister—first that he spurned ties with Latin America (and in particular with Cuba), and secondly that he did so in order to get closer to Washington. Their analysis is direct: "Castañeda pushed Mexico away from its historic position of maintaining a non-interventionist foreign policy, for what he hoped might be a more influential position in world affairs—as a poor man's template of Tony Blair's ties to the White House."⁸