

Also in the last decade both Ottawa and Mexico City introduced "antidote legislation" to counter the extraterritorial aspects of the Helms-Burton Law of 1996, and both threatened to use the NAFTA framework to protest against it. In addition, both Mexico and Canada have very substantial contacts with Cuba in a variety of fora—tourism, business, investment, NGO, academic, and general people-to-people ties. Moreover, given the dependence of both North American countries upon a single large partner, Mexico—like Canada—is the only country in the world where the United States dimension of the relationship with Cuba is so dramatically felt. Finally, as noted above, both countries have seen their relationship with Cuba chill noticeably in recent years—and have reacted accordingly.

In sum, there is indeed a rationale for assessing the Mexican approach to Cuba, and to learning from that experience. Both Mexico and Canada have much to learn from each other, both in terms of their approach to relations with Cuba and, by extension, with Latin America.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first provides an historical overview of the evolution of Mexican-Cuban relations since the 1959 revolution, assessing the principal strengths and weaknesses of each key stage. The second analyzes the fundamental reasons behind the Mexican position. The third examines the successes and failures of Mexico-Cuba relations, assessing what has worked, and what has failed. There then follows a section analyzing the applicability of this for Canadian-Cuban relations.

Mexican-Cuban Relations: An Overview of the PRI Years

Homero Campa, the correspondent in Havana for the respected Mexican journal Proceso between 1992 and 1999, has done an excellent job in dividing up the contemporary Mexico-Cuba relationship into four basic periods: Marriage by Convenience (1959-1991), One Foot on the Island (1991-1994), From the Embrace to Forgetting about You (1994-2000), and Accompanying You as We Go Our Separate Ways (2000-present).²

Common to all these periods has been a somewhat ambivalent level of cordiality. The relationship has always been diplomatically correct, and occasionally quite mutually supportive. Since 1959 Mexico has indeed made an effort to maintain and to develop bilateral relations, largely for reasons outlined in the second section. That is not to say, however, that there have not been problems. The Mexican government was generally very concerned about the Soviet influence in Cuba during the Cold War, and often—like Canada--provided information on Cuban activities to US intelligence agencies. Mexico also acted as a "listening post" on things Cuban for the United States and several other countries.³ It was, then, not the most welcoming of relationships—for example, passengers to and from Cuba were routinely photographed at the Mexico City airport by the CIA, and occasionally a diplomat would be expelled because of activities not appropriate to his or her mission.

Perhaps more serious, Mexican officials were also understandably concerned that the