

Mexico's Foreign Policy towards Israel-Palestine and Iran (2006-2012)

by Marta Tawil

Abstract

This paper examines the foreign policy of Mexico under the Presidency of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012) towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Iran. Ignorance and indifference are singled out as determinants of the prevalence of ideology in Mexico's stances, depending on its combination with other variables. To support this argument, I focus on the ends and purposes, and on agency, in order to assess the relationship and combination of ideological solutions with a pragmatic stance vis-à-vis these two Middle Eastern political files. Mexico's apparently pragmatic stance is best explained by Mexico's dependent relationship with the United States and the articulation of both countries' interest groups. However, such pragmatism does not in itself escape the ideological logic in that its assumptions and judgments seem to have been particularly guided by value-oriented preferences of the foreign policy leadership, foremost President Calderon himself.

Marta Tawil is professor and researcher at the Centre for International Studies of El Colegio de Mexico (Mexico City). She obtained her PhD degree in Political Science/International Relations in July 2008, from the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris (France). Her current research topics are: the foreign policy of Mexico towards the Middle East; the foreign policy consequences of political transitions in the Arab world (Egypt and Tunisia), and the state of the art of Middle East Studies in Mexico in the Discipline of International Relations and the field of Foreign Policy Analysis.

Introduction

In this paper I examine the foreign policy of Mexico under the Presidency of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012)¹ towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Iran. Two main factors, ignorance and indifference, are singled out as determinants of the prevalence of ideology in Mexico's stances, depending on its combination with other variables. To support this argument, I focus on the ends and purposes, and on agency, in order to assess the relationship and combination of doctrinaire solutions with a pragmatic stance vis-à-vis these high political files. I chose three of the most visible episodes of those years: the Israeli military operation in Gaza (Winter 2008-2009); the request of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) that Palestine be recognized as a State first before the United Nations and then before UNESCO (September 2011); and the United Nations Security Council resolution that approved new sanctions on Iran (2010).

At first sight, Mexico's actions in those files show a clear pragmatism. The pragmatic stance is best explained by the enormous weight of Washington's agenda, by Mexico's dependent relationship with the United States, and the articulation of both countries' interest groups. However, such pragmatism does not in itself escape the ideological logic in that its assumptions and judgments seem to have been particularly guided by value-oriented preferences of the foreign policy leadership, foremost the President Calderon himself.

The main sources on which this study is based are newspaper and bibliographical references, official statements, press official notes, speeches by the Presidents' advisors and members of the Department for Africa and the Middle East within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), as well as by the Mexican representatives at the United Nations. I also conducted several interviews, between February and June 2012, at the MFA and its Department for Africa and the Middle East. I also interviewed via e-mail and telephone some Mexican diplomats in office in the Middle East, and had conversations with ambassadors from Arab countries in Mexico. These interviews were

useful both as a complement to the information gathered from primary sources, and as a way to account for the perceptions Mexican officials have about Middle Eastern actors, forces and problems. They also allowed me to get an insight into what those in charge of formulating and implementing foreign policy decisions consider what the role of Mexico towards the Middle East can and must be.

Mexico towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue

The Israeli military operation in Gaza and the Palestinian request to be recognized as a State before the UN and UNESCO

Mexico obtained a seat at the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member at the height of a regional crisis, when on December 27 2008, the Israeli Prime minister at that time, Ehud Olmert, ordered a military offensive against the Gaza Strip (a Palestinian territory of 360 km² of 1,500,000 inhabitants) to strike back at Hamas for rocket fire from Gaza and to punish the civilian population for having Hamas as their leadership: in January 2006, this Islamist political and military group had won democratically the legislative elections in the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank. When Israel began his attack, the government of Hamas in Gaza was stumbling and the living conditions were severely damaged due to the draconian embargo imposed by Israel, the United States, the European Union and Egypt.² Since 2006, the Palestinians had not been able to trade from or towards Gaza, and Israel had so much restricted the humanitarian aid flows that it had reduced the civilian population to to the brink of starvation, as stated by the World Bank and the UN reports³.

During the 22-days war, Israel Israel lost 13 people, including three civilians; the Palestinian casualties rose to approximately 1,400 persons, a majority of whom were civilians⁴ During the Security Council meetings held in January 2009, Mexico's spokesperson, Ambassador Claude Heller, condemned the indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli armed forces—which had bombarded hospitals as well as the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works

Agency for Palestine (UNWRA) and the building that hosted several international media agencies. Mexico noted that the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the prevalent sentiments of injustice and frustration among the Palestinian population were elements that favored extremism and violence; it also declared that without a clear improvement of the living conditions of Palestinians there could be no significant progress towards regional peace and security.⁵ Additionally, Mexico insisted in establishing an international supervising mechanism that could guarantee a lasting cease-fire, the opening of the border crossings, and the control of arms smuggling, on the basis of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009).⁶ In his interventions as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Mexico also warned about the breaching of the engagements contained in the Road Map regarding Israeli policies of settlements, the demolition and expropriation of houses in East Jerusalem, and recalled the illegality of the separation wall as found by the International Court of Justice.⁷ A report headed by judge Richard Goldstone and published some months after the war strongly condemned the actions of the Israeli armed forces in Gaza against civilians; it also denounced Hamas for its indiscriminate attacks.⁸ Mexico's main concern was that the situation "did not become unnecessarily politicized and that the competence and role of the UN was respected"; that is, to the Mexican government, the ideal forum to investigate these matters had to be, first of all, the United Nations Human Rights Council, before they could be taken to the General Assembly.

Moreover, during the Israeli military offensive against Gaza and Hamas, Mexico never questioned whether Israel could legally launch a large-scale military operation against a territory and a population that it had occupied since 1967. Israel reasons that since its withdrawal from Gaza in the summer of 2005, it is no longer an occupying power and therefore it has no responsibility for the welfare of Gazans. The facts show a starkly different situation: the unilateral withdrawal in 2005 did not result in the recognition of Gaza by Israel as an independent territory legitimately governed, and even less as a territory with the right to self-defense. Tel Aviv's argument is used to

justify its blockade policy. "Operation Cast Lead" was justified as "self-defense" against rocket fire – in spite of the fact that it was Israel that violated the ceasefire with Hamas. Another difficult episode related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which Mexico had to take a stand (although Mexico was no longer a member of the Security Council) occurred on September 23, 2011, when the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), Mahmoud Abbas, submitted to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, a request for full membership of Palestine as a State⁹. The PNA stated that its request was an attempt to keep working on a two-state solution, that it did not pretend to replace the negotiations, that it was not a unilateral action because of the non-negotiable character of the nations' self-determination right, and that it did not aim to isolate Israel, but to fight against Israeli occupation.¹⁰

Three months before the UN vote, the Palestinian foreign minister, Riad Malki, invited Mexico to support the PNA's application.¹¹ According to Ms. Randa al- Nabulsi, Ambassador of the ANP to Mexico: "We requested Mexico to vote in favor of our application the same way Mexico voted in favor of the acknowledgement of the Vatican as a permanent Observer at UN and of the Sahrawi Republic as an independent state (on September 1979). Mexico recognized the Sahrawi Republic in spite of the fact that the Republic was not an Observer member of the UN, whereas the Palestine Liberation Organization is since 1974."¹² On the other hand, Ambassador Al-Malki met with members of the Mexican Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies; he told them that Mexico's vote in favor of the recognition of Palestine as a member State to the UN was essential in order to set the tone on the issue among the governments of Central America.

Seeking membership via the UNSC was one option for the PA at this time. The other was to seek non-member state status via the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). When in 2011 the PA tried the UNSC route and was blocked by the US, the PA went to the UNGA in 2012 and achieved a status upgrade. Additionally, on October 31, 2011 UNESCO admitted Palestine as a full member state by 107

votes in favor, 14 votes against and 52 abstentions, including Mexico.¹³

Through a press release the Foreign Ministry justified the abstention of Mexico saying that "Mexico supports the vision about two States - Israel and Palestine- to coexist within secure and recognized international borders in obedience to UN resolutions." However, "UNESCO is not the appropriate forum to achieve a lasting and comprehensive solution to which we all aspire. Moreover, Mexico considers that the decision adopted [today] could disrupt other ongoing initiatives, which are essential to resolve this long conflict once and for all." Mexican officials explained that the failure of Mexico was the result of multiple and intensive consultations with the opposition in several countries and throughout different forums.

Most of all Arab, African and Latin American countries were in favor of Palestine's recognition at UNESCO as well as France, a country which nonetheless had expressed its reservations about the ANP request to the UN. The United States, Canada and Germany voted against, while Italy and the United Kingdom abstained. Mexico and Colombia were the only two Latin American countries that abstained; all the others voted in favor except for Panama which voted against.¹⁴

Mexico explained its abstention by arguing that UN resolutions concerning the conflict had not been fulfilled yet. Indeed, the Palestinian call to the UN was not going to stop the occupation or change Palestinian's daily life in the West bank and the Gaza Strip; the fragmentation of West Bank territory by the presence of illegal settlements and the construction of the separation wall so far impede Palestine from becoming a *de facto* independent State. Actually, during his speech in the 66th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (September 13, 2011), accordingly, President Felipe Calderon said that the UN had to stop the Israeli practices that were contrary to International Law; only then, he added, would a settlement between Israelites [*sic*] and Palestinians become politically viable.¹⁵

This reminder, however, contrasts with the position that Mexico held on the war in Gaza during its participation as elected member of the Security Council, a position which was subsequently endorsed by Mexican spokespersons and diplomats. During that military episode, Mexico justified Israeli actions as "reactions" or "replies" (thus, legitimate) to Palestinian attacks. In some interviews in the Undersecretariat of Foreign Affairs, Mexican officials referred to the Israeli offensive as "a response to the continued rocket fires from Gaza into Israeli territory." This same speech is presented in official press releases¹⁶. As the representative of Mexico to the UN, Claude Heller, said: "The Israel Defense Forces invaded the Gaza Strip in order to begin a military offensive in retaliation to the launching of multiple rockets from this territory against the population in southern Israel, violating the ceasefire previously approved for a six month period."¹⁷ Mexico, therefore, supported Israel's right to self-defense, reducing the whole conflict's history to the launching of rockets from Gaza, and forgetting that such violence has been a symptom of the Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian territories. It should be noted that the Mexican representative's claim was misleading. Hamas in fact strictly observed the ceasefire, firing no rockets. Israel, on the other hand, repeatedly fired over the border at Gazans. Israel also stepped up attacks in the West Bank, prompting some rocket fire from other groups like the Islamic Jihad in Gaza who were not party to the ceasefire, which attacks Hamas actually sought to suppress, with considerable success. Therefore, it was not Hamas, but Israel that violated the ceasefire with an attack on Gaza on November 4, that resulted in the death of six Palestinians, not to mention the approximately five thousand Palestinian deaths—nearly half of them civilians—caused by Israeli actions in the Palestinian territories from 2000 to 2008 (in the same period, 239 Israeli civilians and 243 Israelis of the security forces personnel were killed by Palestinians in the occupied territories).¹⁸

Additionally, officials of the MFA whom I interviewed argue that the Palestinian request to the UN and UNESCO was "a miscalculation", an "imprudent" and "too audacious" decision. They said they felt empathy with the frustration of the Palestinian people, but affirmed

that the UN Human Rights Council “cannot become a forum to hit Israel”. Even though within the MAF many high rank officials admitted that the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu and in particular his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, “usually are not constructive” and have a “very marked tendency to politicize everything, put pressure on us and protest for anything”, practically all regretted that the Palestinians had refused to take advantage of the alternative suggested proposal of Palestine becoming an Observer State before the UN. According to an official of the MFA, the Palestinians “wanted *the whole enchilada*”,¹⁹ when they would have gained more by contenting themselves with raising their category to an additional rank”.

Mexico, therefore, avoided discussing this issue in political terms and took refuge under the umbrella of a procedural argument. According to one official interviewed, the MFA was in favor of the recognition of Palestine as a State before UNESCO from a political perspective; on the other hand, from a strictly juridical prism, the institution was aware that UNESCO was not, strictly speaking, the correct forum for that petition. Apparently, the General department for Africa and the Middle East (Dirección General para África y Medio Oriente) of the MNA proposed to vote in favor, however, “the final decision, as happens with many other high politics issues, was the result either of a direct accord between the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amb. Patricia Espinosa, and the President Calderón, or of the President’s personal decision”.

In his methodological scheme, Gian Luca Gardini (2011) identifies two other factors that influence the mix of pragmatism and ideology in Latin American foreign policies in general. One is the foreign policy process. In Mexico, the process is neither inclusive nor open to several voices when it comes to the particular sensitive political file like Palestine. Concerning public opinion as an explanatory factor of Mexico’s external policies towards Israel and other countries of the Middle East, the influence of non-governmental actors in foreign policy has been part of much debate that highlights either its active participation, the degree of public’s political consciousness, and the

efficiency of mediation mechanisms. The participation and influence of non-state actors interests to the extent that they can limit the decisions of foreign policy practitioners. Therefore, in this paper I only take them into account in as much as they limit or enhance certain foreign policy decisions.

Mexican diplomats in the Middle East as well as MFA officials admit implicitly or explicitly that the economic dependence of Mexico *vis-à-vis* the United States reduces the Mexico's leeway and impedes it to assume an autonomous position in the Palestinian issue. Some officials even coincided that, in the Palestinian-Israeli issue, "everything passes through the President's office and everything is discussed with the Mexican Ambassador to the United States in Washington". All of them also referred to the pressures by interest groups. In the words of a Mexican diplomat in the Middle East, "since the past two generations those interests are well articulated with those in Washington. We witnessed their power at the time of the vote in UNESCO. Particularly Calderon's government has been highly sensitive to the Israeli lobby. The Mexicans of Israeli origin or Jewish faith lobby for Mexico to vote in their favor or at least not to vote against them".

The interpretations of my interlocutors can be completed with the document dated in 2006 filtered by Wikileaks in August 2011. In that document, the operational code of the President concerning the Palestinian and the Arab-Israeli question are revealed, besides the fact that it evidences the interests associated with his relations with the Jewish community in Mexico.²⁰ In the Wikileaks cable it can be read the following description of an episode while Calderon was still in campaign for the Presidency:

The presence of Calderon at the Jewish school Mont Sinai was the first appearance of a presidential candidate before members of the Mexican Jewish community that year. Answering a question of one attendant in the audience concerning the relations of Mexico with Israel, Calderón said that the Mexican

policy towards the Middle East “has been terribly deficient”. This can be illustrated, in Calderon’s view, by “the tradition of the Mexican governments to support anti-Israeli resolutions in multilateral forums in a rash, impulsive, manner”. Calderon said that if he was elected President, Mexico would cease to have a predetermined position with regards to any resolutions concerning the Middle East, and that he would consider each one separately. He strongly condemned the decision made by President Luis Echeverría (1970-76) of promoting at the UN the infamous resolution “Zionism is a form of racism”, an action that Calderón qualified as “anti-Semite” [*sic*].

In February 2007, the vice-secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Lourdes Aranda, met in Mexico City with the deputy prime minister and minister of Industry and Commerce of Israel, Eliyahu Yishai. They exchanged opinions over Mexico’s position at the UN. On September 26 of the same year, in New York, Amb. Aranda met with members of the American-Jewish Committee and the B’nai B’rith Organization. She expressed the interest of the Mexican government in continuing and consolidating the dialogue between the Jewish communities in Mexico and those in the United States. Two years after those meetings, and three years after he became President, Felipe Calderón attended a breakfast with the Central Committee of the Jewish Community in Mexico in June 2009. After claiming that this Committee was the sole and official representative for the relationship with the Mexican authorities at all levels (political parties, intellectual, academic, religious and social groups), his president, Oscar Gorodzinsky, added that:

Topics such as Mexican migration to the US, the approval of the Iniciativa Mérida and the strict control of the border to avoid the smuggling of arms into Mexico, have been put on the table by our representatives and generally by the directors of Jewish institutions in the US, key members of the US

Congress, as well as officials of the State Department. As it was done five weeks ago when we took advantage of our presence in Washington to meet with the American Jewish Committee to express to American officials and congressmen the importance American cooperation has for Mexico at this moment [...] It is regrettable, too, that the Middle East is still in the midst of a conflict that seems to have no end. Between Israel, the only and true democracy in the Middle East, and a group of neighbors who still refuse to recognize its existence [...] by the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 we witnessed a new chapter of this conflict when Israeli troops had to confront Hamas' terrorist groups which control the Gaza Strip, in order to defend its citizens from the constant missile attacks coming from that zone. We would like to use this moment to congratulate and thank your government, which through the MFA and its representative at the UN Security Council, made steady, but objective, pronouncements in a battle that we all hope will be resolved through negotiation channels.²¹

According to a member of the Mexican Foreign Service ascribed to the Instituto Matías Romero, during the PAN administrations headed by Presidents Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) there was a “change of view of the game”:

Since the government of Vicente Fox I clearly perceive that Mexico puts Palestinians and Israelis, an occupied population and the occupying force, at the same level, as if they had equal force; this is a mistake. Mexico is trying to please both of them. More than *Realpolitik*, this has to do with a lack of vision of the Mexican State, of the role Mexico wants to play in the long term. It is certainly true that structural factors (the power of the US) are very important and

inescapable, but it is also true that in Mexico we never look for alternatives that would allow us to dodge those pressures. Presidents Fox and Calderon have even acted against what the MFA suggestions.

Another official ascribed to the Foreign Service explained to me: “Mexico considers as occupation the situation in East Jerusalem, and denounces it. Our country has never considered Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel, but it has never stated explicitly that it has to be part of a future Palestinian State. This ambivalence shows that Mexico is determined to be impartial in one of the thorniest and hot topics of the Arab-Israeli conflict”. For another official, “the most concrete threats and pressures come from the US Congressmen; they do not beat around the bush”.

The arrival of Barack Obama to the White House could have increased Mexico’s leeway towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given the tensions and disagreements that existed between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and given the hopes that the speech Obama pronounced in Cairo in June 2009 generated. However, such disagreements were actually over matters of little substance and in his speech in Cairo President Obama made it clear that the US sided with Israel in the conflict. What is a more accurate assessment is that the Mexican economy was precarious; 2009 was the year of the world financial crisis that affected Mexico by relatively reducing its exports, remittances and foreign investments, among other factors. Under those circumstances, it can be said that the Mexican government perceived it was a risky moment to irritate the relations with the Israeli-Jewish-American economic group, affecting national investments and tourism negatively, and also the *Iniciativa Mérida*²² and US support in the war against drug-trafficking and other security topics that were the priority of Calderon’s agenda.²³ Practically all the officials ascribed to the Foreign Service and the MFA expressed their fear that something similar to what happened under the Presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1976-1982) could happen again. At that time, the Jewish community in Mexico incited an economic and touristic boycott against Mexico

which severely damaged the Mexican economy between 1975 and 1976.²⁴ This precedent, they said, obliges Mexico to “juggle”. Besides, in contrast to the period between 1932 and 1949,²⁵ in 2011 we find no coordinated Arab or Palestinian interest group that could function as a counterweight to the pro-Israeli lobby.

Between January 1999 and March 2008, enterprises with Israeli capital made investments of 14.1 million dollars, making Israel rank as the first in the list of Middle East countries in that period (this figure does not include the investments of Israeli companies established in the US, therefore, the number could be higher). In April 2011, Mexico and Israel exchanged their views about their economic relationship and stressed that since the entry into force of their bilateral free trade agreement (July 2000), the bilateral trade increased approximately 180%. At present, Israel is Mexico's trade partner number 45, and Mexico is the second destination of Israeli exports among Latin American countries.²⁶ It must be noted, also, that cooperation in intelligence, counterintelligence and the use of preventive technologies in the security field between Mexico and Israel has grown.²⁷

Although it is clear that structures—the Mexican economy and Mexico's dependent relationship with the United States—certainly affect individual perceptions and behavior, it is also acknowledged that the period between 2001 and 2008 offered Mexico a leeway that could have resulted in more critical and assertive statements; however, their officials and President Calderón decided none. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane have identified three possible pathways to explore how the ideas and beliefs of individual leaders affect foreign policy. First, ideas provide road maps to interpret reality and select a limited set of desired outcomes among the many possible. Second, in the absence of a unique and clearly defined course of action, ideas orientate decision makers' strategic choices. Finally, once ideas are institutionalized in a consolidated set of norms and rules, they define policy in the absence of further innovation.²⁸

The reactions of Mexicans to the abstention vote of Mexico at UNESCO did not wait too long to express themselves. In the opinion of the Palestinian Ambassador to Mexico, Randa al-Nabulsi,²⁹ for Palestinians, Mexico's vote was a "milestone"; "Mexico had always been, along with Cuba and Brazil, our support referent in Latin America". I was informed that the group of Arab and Islamic countries which have a diplomatic representation in Mexico expressed, in a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Espinosa, their disappointment, something officials close to Espinosa denied.

In Mexico, besides some small groups from the civil society who mobilized in protest against Mexico's abstention at UNESCO,³⁰ no demonstrations as big as those registered in countries like Argentina, Venezuela, or Ecuador took place. It can be said that, in its majority, Mexican media and public opinion showed no interest in the subject, whereas some legislators from PRI (centre-right), PRD, PT and Movimiento Ciudadano (Left) questioned Minister Espinosa when she appeared before the Senate. This happened at a moment of a huge scandal after the discovery of the US military secret operation called "*Rápido y furioso*" ("Operation Fast and Furious").³¹ These congressmen denounced that federal government had subordinated the interests of Mexico to those of the United States and Israel, and characterized Calderon's foreign policy as "rickety, gray, spineless and unfortunately subjugated to the US".³² The senator president of the Committee of Foreign Affairs for Asia and Africa, as well as the PRI legislators demanded explanations, and considered that Mexico's abstention "left Mexico far behind with respect to the Latin-American block".³³ To me, it is clear that the attitude of these legislators is far from new and that their criticisms reflect a politically profitable opportunism and Anti-Americanism, rather than a true understanding and knowledge of the topic.³⁴

In a speech he gave when Mexico was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the two-year period 2009-2010, Calderón declared that "[From this position], we will defend our conviction that law and reason must be the basis for the pacific

resolution of conflicts. Mexico has demanded an immediate cease-fire of hostilities in the Gaza conflict; we have condemned the use of force and particularly those against civilians undertaken by *terrorist groups* like Hamas and Hezbollah as well as by the Israeli army”.³⁵ It was the first time a Mexican President publicly characterized Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorists. In this respect, it could be argued that another element that distorts Mexico's dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian issue is introduced by the dynamics of domestic politics, more specifically, the preferences and world vision of the President and his advisors. It is nonetheless troubling that the President and his closest advisors had decided to characterize Hamas and Hezbollah as “terrorist groups”, violating Mexico's diplomatic tradition and deliberately ignoring the distinction within Hamas and Hezbollah between the political and military battles, both motivated by nationalist claims, and forgetting the social and electoral legitimacy that both groups enjoy among some important sectors of the Palestinian and the Lebanese populations, respectively. Some members of the MFA said they were astonished by the President's words, because they clearly contravened Mexico's position with respect to the definition and use of the term “terrorism”.

At least two conclusions can be drawn from this episode. First, by opting for the abstention, Mexico implicitly endorsed the narrative Israel has proposed since 1948: when there is peace, the State of Palestine will be recognized, not the other way round. By acting on this basis, it would seem that the Mexican government ignored the difficult position President Abbas was facing;³⁶ in order to be equidistant, Mexico froze all possibility of backing up its international commitment with the Human Rights agenda and multilateralism. Second, from a strictly procedural and juridical interpretation, it could be said that Mexico showed congruence by desisting from the symbolic message that dozens of other countries wanted to send to Israel. In this sense, it could even be argued that the abstention vote was an expression of Mexico's autonomy because if it did not vote in favor of the recognition of Palestine as a State, it did not vote against it either. Finally, on November the 29th 2012, Mexico was among the 139 States which voted in favor of raising the status of Palestine to

that of a non-member observer state of the UN (nine States voted against, among them the US, Canada and Israel). In an interview with officials of the MFA days after this vote, they said they were confident that Mexico would not have to pay a political or economic cost “because the US, the Jewish community and the pro-Israeli lobby knew this time that we did not have a choice but to vote in favor”.

Members of the Sub-Ministry of FA insisted in reminding this author that Mexico has always backed the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State and they offer as a proof of Mexico’s prestige the invitation it received to attend the Peace Conference in Annapolis in 2007. They also mentioned that on July the 29th 2012, during the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee, Mexico was among the 13 nations that voted in favor (6 voted against and 2 abstained) of the resolution that registered the “Site of Jesus’ birth: the Nativity Church and the Pilgrimage path, Belen” in the List of the World Heritage and the List of World Heritage in Danger. This favorable vote of Mexico is presented by our interlocutors at the MFA as “a great foreign policy achievement”. In the Palestinian question, thus, Mexico found a chance to safeguard its image as an autonomous country by denouncing the separation wall and the illegal Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories (the only two Israel’s projects that American administrations firmly denounce), and by defending the protection of monuments.

Mexico and the Iranian nuclear program

As a non-permanent member of the Security Council (2009-2010), Mexico had to deal almost continuously with scenarios involving Iran and this country’s problems with the agenda of the Arab Gulf monarchies, Israel and the US. In particular, the Iranian nuclear program represented one of the most critical moments for the Mexican Presidency of the Security Council. On June 9 2010, Mexico voted in favor of resolution 1920, which authorized the imposition of new sanctions against the regime in Tehran. With eleven other votes in favor, two against (Brazil and Turkey), and the abstention of Libya,

the resolution approved extending the sanctions against Iran due to the alleged lack of transparency of its nuclear program.³⁷

Although Mexico sustains that Iran has the right to develop a national nuclear program with pacific ends, Calderon's government justified its vote in terms of Mexico's engagement with disarmament and with the need to make the Middle East a nuclear-free zone. This is certainly a praiseworthy proposal, but one which does not escape incongruence, because Israel is the only country in the region that possesses nukes and nonetheless Mexico does not call for Israel to disarm. In the words of Mexican Ambassador to the United Nations, Claude Heller: "The recent diplomatic initiatives in this file are, in our judgment, not enough, because we do not see a clear engagement (on the part of Iran) to put an end to its activities of enriching uranium and do not attend the concerns of the international community[...]"³⁸ The MFA pointed out that Mexico has insisted that Iran cooperate in a more transparent manner with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), besides fulfilling its obligations contained in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The statement added that "Mexico is deeply engaged with nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the pacific uses of nuclear energy, therefore it is worried to see the non-proliferation regime infringed" and that "the use of nuclear energy for pacific purposes has to be accompanied by a clear commitment to respect the juridical obligations freely contracted". The MFA clarified that Mexico's vote favoring the widening of sanctions against Iran was only addressed to the institutions involved in nuclear activities, and that it did not "suspend the diplomatic negotiations with Iran, nor the search of a pacific way to resolve the disagreements".³⁹

Mexico's vote was preceded by a crisis resolution document that Brazil and Turkey jointly elaborated. Indeed, in 2010 both countries participated in intensive negotiations with Iranian officials and, to the astonishment of many, they reached a deal with Tehran.⁴⁰ However, the so-called P5+1 (that is, the five permanent members of the Security Council, plus Germany) quickly dismissed the deal and proceeded instead with the imposition of new sanctions, justifying

their position on the grounds that the deal did not commit Iran to curb its uranium enriching program.

How dangerous Iran's program is and how close it is to possessing the bomb is a matter of highly divergent opinions. Despite claims that Iran's nuclear program is intended to produce a bomb, but there is no evidence Iran has a nuclear weapons program. Some point out at the technical obstacles that impede Iran to reach its objective (even though there is no evidence this is Iran's objective) and no one offers concrete evidence that Iran is about to have the nuclear bomb (indeed, the U.S. intelligence community has assessed that Iran has no nuclear weapons program);⁴¹ for its part, Israel has maintained a bellicose and alarmist discourse.⁴² It is a fact, in any case, that Mexico had to deal with a situation in which information was scarce, partial and susceptible of being interpreted according to the interests of each country. Nonetheless, according to the advisors of the Sub-ministry for Multilateral agenda and Human Rights within the MFA, Mexico "counted on nuclear experts who thoroughly revised the reports of the IAEA and the Iranian statements. Even if the analyses made by the Mexican experts could not establish with sufficient clarity that Iran was developing a nuclear program for military purposes, they did demonstrate that the capacities so far developed [by Iran] were unnecessary to achieve the objectives in nuclear energy and medicine which Iran presented as the motivations of its program".⁴³ Mexico's position was all the more absurd considering that Iran's nuclear program began under the Shah with US support. For a long time, Mexico has refused pressures or threats emanating from Washington concerning the presence of Iran in Latin America⁴⁴, and the Iranian nuclear program.⁴⁵ At the same time, however, Mexico has endorsed the so-called *dual-track* (sanctions mixed with dialogue, or the policy of the carrot and the stick), the policy Washington (and Brussels) have pursued until now.⁴⁶ Roberto Dondisch and Alcibiades Sánchez (2012) explain Mexico's position on the grounds of the preoccupation of the international community concerning "the continuous development of missile systems [...] and Iran's political discourse". For these and other actors of the Mexican foreign policy circle, Iranian nuclear policy cannot be abstracted from its foreign

policy “whose pronouncements have raised legitimate doubts and concerns about the intentions of Iran, that are incompatible with the UN Charter and with International Law. That is to say, it is not acceptable to adduce that one is a pacifist country when at the same time one is calling for the destruction of Israel or participating manifestly in regional conflicts through the support of certain political or armed groups”.⁴⁷

Another interpretation underlines that neither the sanctions nor military action have seemed to be a realist method of proven efficiency so as to push Tehran to change its attitude; on the contrary. First of all, globalization offers a whole range of substitutions: when a group of States sanctions a deviant government, the latter can find in a variety of countries the means to compensate the pressure or the deprivation of which it is victim. Globalization also offers the opportunity to curb sanctions: multinational groups become a support of strategies that allow a State to avoid the disastrous effects of sanctions. In a context of poverty and authoritarianism, sanctions are comfortably manipulated by the targeted government. It is therefore difficult to find a stunning diplomatic future to this practice. From this perspective, some analysts think that sanctions have only had the effect of making Tehran more fearful of becoming the target of an attack similar to the one inflicted in 2003 on Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and for this reason Iran would seek to increase its dissuasive power with the nuclear bomb.⁴⁸ Iran is one of the three non-Arab countries in the Middle East (besides Israel and Turkey) and the only Shia Islamic state surrounded by Arab actors whose population is mostly Sunni (except for Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon), and governed by Sunni (with the exception of Iraq since the fall of Saddam's regime, and Lebanon, which is ruled by a complex religious system). This condition has certainly influenced the perception of Tehran about its role played in the region. Throughout the MENA region, Syria is the only ally on which Iran can count—and that is not exactly a great comfort. Since the mid-nineties, Tehran tried to improve its relations with Egypt, although their rapprochement did not last long. Its relations with the other members of the Arab League can be considered distant

enough. As for the great powers, Europe's submission to the agenda dictated by the Bush administration in Iraq and the Middle East left Tehran with no instruments to counterweight Washington's presence. Finally, Israel, India, and Pakistan have nuclear weapons, and unlike Iran, they did not sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Agreement. Therefore it is not surprising that the Iranian government perceives itself as a besieged fortress.⁴⁹

None of these considerations seem to be included in Mexico's reading of Iranian politics. Mexican officials downplay the importance of the Turkish-Brazilian initiative, interpreting it as a movement associated to Brazil's hope to get a permanent seat in the Security Council. This perception shows that Brazil's foreign policy is erratic and "lurches", while Mexico's foreign policy defends a "gradual perspective", encourages "non-extreme prospects" and "incentives Iran". In interviews, some officials within the MFA admitted their doubts about the effectiveness of sanctions, but emphasized that Mexico was careful enough not to allow in the text the mentioning of any possibility of an eventual use unilateral or automatic force against Iran if sanctions were violated. Thus, Mexico's perspective is that sanctions must be an incentive to Iran in order to prevent the use of force.

This reading resulted in a restricted agenda and a lack of explicit calls by Mexico to rethink strategies and develop creative proposals designed to build-up trust and achieve long-term solutions, i.e. different solutions from those that the great powers have envisaged so far. Despite its failure, the Brazilian-Turkish exercise provided an opportunity to test several assumptions: in the first place, Iran and other countries should be involved at all levels of negotiation; secondly, economic pressure can be useless and counterproductive; finally, Tehran must be presented with a realistic proposal. Mexico did not recognize that the Islamic Republic of Iran might want to define its security interests guided by realpolitik considerations, and characterized as naïve the ambition of Brazil to play a global role by engaging in "such a complex issue that does not belong to its geographical contiguous area". Opinions diverge on the compatibility

between Brazil's ambitions and capabilities. What is clear is that Brazil has been able and willing to exploit its links with South American countries, whereas Mexico does not have a coherent and assertive strategy towards its closest region, Central America, even though this sub-region represents the most immediate threat and opportunity for Mexico's economic, political and social fields. Furthermore, diplomacy mainly works to reduce the gap between states, and a 'diplomatic weapon' such as sanctions should embrace this objective in order to promote, directly or indirectly, a rapprochement between nations, without giving up essential national interests. It is paradoxical, therefore, not to conceive sanctions as a diplomatic incentive but as a weapon, unless it is used to prevent war between Iran and the regional and international powers. It can be said that Mexico's position confirms that the consequences of its decision in the nineties to become integrated to the North American region are enduring, and difficult to change in the short or medium term.

Final remarks

Generally speaking, Calderon's government accorded little space to the Middle East. The objectives outlined in official foreign policy documents show that the MENA region continued to occupy a negligible part within the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (pnd) 2007-2012. The Middle East was not only the shortest section of all; it also included the whole African continent.⁵⁰ In the PND it is clear that no distinction or geographical delimitation was made of the Middle East region; its economic potential was not made explicit either. The manifest interest was "to diversify Mexican export markets and to enhance the exchange of economic, trade and investment information between Mexico, the Middle East and Africa". Generally, the reference to the Asian and African regions in the PND is based on the idea that the diversification of trade relations must allow Mexico to expand its presence in the world markets and, therefore, to strengthen its sovereignty and to back an independent conduct of its foreign policy.

Under Felipe Calderon's government the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) laid out relatively assertive trade diplomacy towards the Gulf countries. The main motivations behind this drive, which has become more visible since 2008, are diverse⁵¹. Almost all the officials I interviewed agreed to identify the world financial crisis of 2008 as the main explaining factor behind Mexico's will to diversify its economic relations with the Gulf region.⁵²

By the end of Calderon's government, Mexico had embassies in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, UAE, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon and Morocco. No free-trade agreement was signed with any Arab country, but the increase in trade exchanges was accompanied by diverse contracts signed with some Gulf countries. Towards the end of Calderon's presidency, the main destination of Mexican exports, in order of importance, were the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and Qatar, whereas Mexico imported from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Morocco, UAE and Tunisia⁵³ (according to figures of the Ministry of Economy from 2006 to 2011). Even though the growth of Mexico's trade exchanges with Arab countries was far from being exponential, and that many figures relative to trade and investment exchanges with the Middle East are imprecise because most of them pass through third countries, the overall tendency highlight a steady rise.⁵⁴ Relations between Mexico and the Gulf countries under Felipe Calderon's government were, thus, quite fruitful as far as trade and investment are concerned. The prevailing relative political stability in those countries (when compared to the instability of North African and Levantine countries), and the opportunities they offer to investment and trade exchanges, certainly contributed to this development.

However, the focus on trade relations was not linked to an overall state strategy in which political and cultural interests could be associated to economic objectives or to the will of strengthening the presence and influence of Mexico in the world. Some Mexican officials and Arab diplomats alluded to the high levels of protectionism, sometimes arrogance and inefficiency, within the Ministry of Communications and Transport, the Ministry of Labor,

and the Ministry of Finance. In their view, these problems were a serious obstacle to the proper launching, coordination and management of economic projects between Mexico and the Gulf countries. It is also telling that that Calderon's government preferred to open an Embassy in Kuwait and not in Qatar, whose unequalled investment and foreign policy capacities have made this country one of the most influential actors in the regional and international scenes.

The above analysis demonstrates that the dialectic between ends and purposes, on the one hand, and agency and structure, on the other, is the main factor that impacts the mix of ideology and pragmatism in the policies of Mexico towards the Middle East. In the political field, Mexico's foreign policy principles were evoked at some point in the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Besides that, Mexico made no use of rhetorical tools or initiatives. Felipe Calderon's government limited itself to orient the interests of national entrepreneurs and investors, and opted for a low profile role on high politics issues. In the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Mexico appealed to International Law and repeatedly denounced the construction of illegal settlements in the Palestinian territories. At the same time, it conditioned the support of the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination to the unsuccessful negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. If the objective was to prevent economic penalties and to maintain good relations with the United States, it can be argued from a cost-benefit view perspective that Felipe Calderon government's diplomacy was effective. However, the Mexican government adopted an image of consensus that embraces two equally suffered extremist minorities by Palestinians and Israelis at the same type and magnitude of violence despite the asymmetric power relation between the two sides. In this case, the most significant explanatory factor is the condition imposed by the international system —Mexico's dependency vis-à-vis Washington. This factor was, in turn, filtered by the predisposition of the ruling class, headed by the Executive power (Felipe Calderón), and of decision-makers in Mexico and Washington, to interpret events in the Middle East through the prism of their prejudices and preferences and their poor understanding of the Middle East. It could also be

assumed that Calderón's team "understood" the Palestinian problem and the attacks of groups like Hamas through the prism of their experience with groups of the transnational organized crime in Mexican territory.

References

¹ Felipe Calderón became President of Mexico from December 1, 2006 to November 30, 2012. He is a member of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the right-wing political party in Mexico and one of the three major Mexican political parties.

² Augustus R. Norton, "The Gaza War: Antecedents and Consequences." *Real Instituto Elcano*. March 2, 2008, accessed October 3, 2010, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/mediterranean+arab+world/ari21-2009.

³ Israel actually kept enough aid flowing to prevent outright starvation. The policy was designed to keep them on the brink..

⁴ "Middle East Report: Gaza's Unfinished Business," International Crisis Group, Report 85, April 23, 2009, accessed October 11, 2011. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/85-gazas-unfinished-business.aspx>.

⁵ "Reunión del Consejo de Seguridad sobre la situación en Medio Oriente," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release no. 4, January 6, 2009, accessed October 12, 2011, http://www.sre.gob.mx/csocal_viejo/contenido/comunicados/2009/jan/cp_004.html

⁶ The Security Council adopted the 1860 resolution (2009) with 14 votes in favor (including Mexico) and one abstention (United States). This was the only resolution adopted by the Security Council directly

related to the crisis. In general, the resolution calls for an immediate cease-fire, the reopening of border crossings, access for humanitarian assistance to Gaza and condemnation of violence against civilians. At the same time, on the 9th Special Session "Serious human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the recent aggression on Gaza" (January 9 to 12, 2009), Mexico voted for the resolution, which was adopted by 33 votes in favor, 1 against and 13 abstentions.

⁷ "Intervención del Embajador Claude Heller, Representante Permanente de México ante las Naciones Unidas, en el debate abierto del Consejo de Seguridad sobre la situación en el Medio Oriente," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 28, 2011, accessed August 30, 2012. http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/news/ga65-113/docs/Mexico_Sp.pdf. The Roadmap is a document prepared by the "Quartet", officially adopted in December 2002 and published in April 2003 (after Mahmoud Abbas was nominated Prime minister). The document aimed to reach, in three stages, a final settlement based on the "two-state coexistence" principle. The Roadmap included the observations made in 2001 by the U.S. Senator George Mitchell about the need for Israel to "stop all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of the existing ones". That request was the basis of the Annapolis conference in November 2007 sponsored by the U.S. government and designed to refresh, again without success, the negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, with the participation of neighboring countries. The "security wall" is a still unfinished wall built by the Israeli government (it extends to West Bank territory, getting up to 22 miles in some areas) that includes illegal Jewish settlements. In 2004, the International Court of Justice declared its construction a violation of International Law.

⁸ The mission headed by Judge Goldstone published a 574-page report in September 2009. The report urged both parties, Hamas and Israel, to investigate the crimes committed and accused them of deliberately using civilians as targets. Israel refused to cooperate with

the Goldstone mission and forbade it the entry to Gaza from Israel territory. Several Jewish communities worldwide boycotted the mission.

⁹ This request was part of the Palestinian prime minister's plan, Salam Fayyad, to create a sovereign state in 2011 with East Jerusalem as its capital; it was intended to consolidate Palestinian institutions and to stop the Israeli occupation. Over 120 governments have recognized the Palestinian state. However, Palestine participates in the UN General Assembly only as an Observer member; it is represented by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

¹⁰ The rights and privileges of this category are not well-defined, so the implications are not clear. Since the PLO became Observer at UN in 1974, the General Assembly *has* since voted to upgrade Palestine to non-members state status.

¹¹ "Los palestinos piden a México votar en la ONU por la creación de su Estado." *CNN México*, August 9, 2011, accessed February 12, 2012. <http://mexico.cnn.com/nacional/2011/08/09/los-palestinos-piden-a-mexico-votar-en-la-onu-por-la-creacion-de-su-estado>.

¹² Randa al- Nabulsi arrived in October 2010. She was the first Palestinian ambassador who presented letter of credence to the Mexican President instead of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

¹³ It was never actually put to a vote, because the US promised to veto it.

¹⁴ Mexico does not yet recognize the Palestinian territories as a sovereign state as many Latin American countries do (i.e. Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Paraguay). So far, about 120 UN member countries have recognized the Palestinian state claimed by the Algiers Declaration of 1988.

¹⁵ “¿Qué dijo Calderón ante la ONU?”, *Animal Político*, September 21, 2011, accessed October 11, 2012.

<http://www.animalpolitico.com/2011/09/%C2%BFque-dijo-calderon-ante-la-onu-textual/#axzz2sezain2R>.

¹⁶ In the words of Claude Heller: "We must remember here that only by introducing a monitoring mechanism and by stopping the smuggling of weapons into Gaza Strip will the ceasefire be achieved; this is partly what explains the recent crisis." See: "Intervención del Embajador Claude Heller, Representante Permanente de México ante las Naciones Unidas, en el debate abierto del Consejo de Seguridad sobre la situación en el Medio Oriente." Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁷ Claude Heller, "Una contribución por un mundo mejor: las presidencias de México en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU (2009-2010)," in *México en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU. La historia tras bambalinas*, coordinated by Roberto Dondisch (Mexico: Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Debate, 2012), 32.

¹⁸ In Israeli territory, 69 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces and 2 by Israeli civilians, whereas 471 Israeli civilians and 88 members of security forces were killed by Palestinians. For further details and data, see the reports and statistics elaborated by B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. <http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/before-cast-lead/by-date-of-event> (accessed on February 20, 2014)

¹⁹ During Vicente Fox's administration (2000-2006), Mexico pushed for "a comprehensive reform" of U.S. immigration law that addressed the problem of the illegal immigration to the United States. The issue had been called "The Whole Enchilada" by Fox's administration stated that "immigration reform in the United States should address mutual border problems, the rights of undocumented immigrants, and the development of regions in Mexico that 'expel' migrants".

²⁰ “Cable 06MEXICO3069,” Wikileaks, accessed November 9, 2012, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2006/06/06MEXICO3069.html>.

²¹ “Diversas intervenciones en la comida con los miembros de la comunidad judía de México,” Presidential Office, June 19, 2009, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/2009/06/diversas-intervenciones-en-la-comida-con-los-miembros-de-la-comunidad-judia-de-mexico/>.

²² The Mérida Initiative is a security cooperation agreement between the United States and the government of Mexico and the countries of Central America, with the declared aim of combating the threats of drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and money laundering. The assistance includes training, equipment and intelligence. U.S. State Department officials were aware that Mexican President Felipe Calderón’s willingness to work with the United States is unprecedented on issues of security, crime and drugs, so the U.S. Congress passed legislation in late June 2008 to provide Mexico with \$400 million and Central American countries with \$65 million that year for the Mérida Initiative. The initiative was announced on 22 October 2007 and signed into law on June 30, 2008.

²³ Rafael Velázquez, “La política exterior de Estados Unidos hacia México bajo la administración de Barack Obama: cambios y continuidades.” *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas* 220 (2011): 9-11.

²⁴ This boycott was a response to Mexico's vote at the United Nations in favor of a statement that described Zionism as a form of racism.

²⁵ Arturo Magaña Duplancher, “Presiones y decisiones en política exterior: dos momentos de México ante el conflicto árabe-israelí.” *Relaciones Internacionales* 17 (2011): 123-151. To understand why Lebanese and other Arab groups do not organise in transnational

interest groups capable of influencing Mexican government so as to act in favor of Palestinian and other sensitive Arab issues, see Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, "Immigrant Positioning in Twentieth-Century Mexico: Middle Easterners, Foreign Citizens and Multiculturalism", *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86 no. 1 (2006): 61-91.

²⁶ "México e Israel buscan incrementar su relación comercial", *Empresa Exterior*, April 11, 2011, accessed September 22, 2012, <http://www.empresaexterior.com/2011041239352/politica-economica/noticias/mexico-e-israel-buscan-incrementar-su-relacion-comercial.html>.

²⁷ Foreign Ministry officials interviewed by the author confirmed that Israel offered Mexico training to ensure safety during the Pan American Games held in Guadalajara from October 14 to 30, 2011. The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States (funded by United States) provided the money for training. These and other operations and transactions are often triangulated through the United States. Israel has also appeared in stories about the drug war in Mexico; prove of it is the disclosure in 2012 about a purchase of drones Hermes 450 by the Ministry of National Defense to the Israeli company Elbit Systems for \$25 million made between April 30 and July 30, 2009. See: Arturo Ángel, "Empresa israelí sobornó a México en compra de drones, revela WikiLeaks", *24 Horas*, February 27, 2012, accessed March 16, 2012. <http://www.24-horas.mx/israel-soborno-a-mexico-en-compra-de-drones-revela-wikileaks/> ; Nydia Egremy, "Agenda México-Estados Unidos: ¿Qué hacer con los drones?", *Centro de Estudios Políticos para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Desarrollo*, September 29, 2012, accessed December 12, 2012. <http://www.nodo50.org/ceprid/spip.php?article1523> ; Robert Beckhusen, "Advanced Israeli Drone May Spy on Mexican Drug Cartels," *Wired*, March 15, 2012, accessed November 9, 2012. <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/03/mexico-drones/>

²⁸ Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁹ The Palestinian Authority has a special delegation in Mexico since 1995; Mexico set up a special office in Palestine in 2005, when Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian Authority.

³⁰ As during the Israeli war on Gaza, the protest was organized by groups such as the Mexican Movement of Solidarity with Palestine. They collected thousands of signatures, letters and articles that were presented in several forums and media. See: "Apoyo al reconocimiento de Palestina como estado miembro de la ONU", *La Jornada*, September 25, 2011.

³¹ "Gunwalking", or "letting guns walk", was a tactic of the Arizona Field Office of the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), which ran a series of sting operations between 2006 and 2011 in the Tucson and Phoenix area where the ATF "purposely allowed licensed firearms dealers to sell weapons to illegal straw buyers, hoping to track the guns to Mexican drug cartel leaders and arrest them." These operations were done under the umbrella of Project Gunrunner, a project intended to stem the flow of firearms into Mexico by interdicting straw purchasers and gun traffickers within the United States. The Chambers case began in October 2009, and eventually became known in February 2010 as "Operation Fast and Furious" after agents discovered some of the suspects under investigation belonged to a car club.

³² Andrea Becerril and Víctor Ballinas, "PRI, PRD y PT fustigan la política exterior calderonista", *La Jornada*, September 28, 2011, 11.

³³ "Lamenta PRI falta de respaldo a Palestina en la Unesco", *Milenio*, October 31, 2011, accessed January 22, 2012.
<http://www.liberal.com.mx/portal/nota.php?id=145676>

³⁴ We should remember, in example, that legislators never questioned the Mexican government when the Free Trade Agreement with Israel was signed in 2000 --at the end of the administration of Ernesto Zedillo, 1994-2000-- despite it did not include a clause that could have limited trade exchanges to the Israel territory in accordance with the Security Council resolution 242 and others related to the occupation of Palestinian territories; i.e. the agreement did not specify that products coming from illegal settlements had to be excluded from exchanges with Mexico. There are many countries that exclude from their agreements with Israel products made in the occupied territories. The European Court of Justice took a stand on the application of the territoriality principle to the EU-Israel trade agreement referring to the UN resolutions. Another example is the Mercosur Free Trade Agreement with Israel, signed in 2010. Although it does not specify the territorial issue, the members of Mercosur later included a joint statement in which they clarified that settlement products will not be included in their trade relations with Israel.

³⁵ "Crónica mensual 26," Presidential Office, January, 2009, accessed March 13, 2012 http://calderon.presidencia.gob.mx/felipecalderon/cronica_mensual/26_el_gobierno_mexicano_2009_01.pdf.

³⁶ The Mahmoud Abbas administration had run out of options and had to face growing disappointment and frustration from the Palestinian population. At that moment Abbas was only "President-in-office of the Palestinian Authority" (since his Presidential mandate had already expired), while he was dealing with the division of the West Bank and Gaza territories as a reflection of the PLO-Hamas confrontation, and Israel's refusal to make any territorial concessions. He was in a situation that allowed him to play an all-or-nothing game to try to get the top prize, and then, as events evolved, settle for less -as indeed happened when he turned to the UNESCO.

³⁷ “Explica SRE voto de México a favor de sanciones a Irán.” *Crónica*, June 9, 2010. Accessed August 12, 2012.
<http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2010/511724.html>.

³⁸ Transcription of the speech pronounced by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to United Nations and President of the Security Council, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, press release #034, June 9, 2010.

³⁹ The embargo included eight new categories of conventional weapons like tanks and warplanes. The opening of new Iranian banking, financial or any other institutions that may be linked to the nuclear program are forbidden. The resolution includes the following elements that Mexican officials considered of most importance: i) sanctions are addressed against individuals or entities associated to Iran’s nuclear program, ii) the IAEA must play a central role in the task of verifying the nature of Iran's nuclear program, iii) sanctions can be reviewed and suspended if Iran stops all the activities related to the enrichment of uranium and if it fully complies with the Security Council resolutions and the requirements of the IAEA Board of Governors.

⁴⁰ The Turkish-Brazilian initiative stated, among other things, that Iran would agree to exchange 1200 kg of enriched material to 3.5%, for 120 kg of enriched material to 20%. Previously agreed by United States, France, Russia and the IAEA (Vienna Group), Iran would send the nuclear material to Turkey until the IAEA delivered the enriched material to 20% for the Teheran research reactor.

⁴¹ Stephen Walt, “A Riddle, Wrapped in a Mystery, Inside an Enigma...” *Foreign Policy*, February 11, 2010, accessed February 10, 2012.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/02/11/a_riddle_wrapped_in_a_mystery_inside_an_enigma.

⁴² By the end of the summer of 2009, Israel carried out military tests at the possibility to strike Iran's nuclear facilities; several U.S. military officials expressed their satisfaction with the plan, considering it a necessity. See: "In Heavy Waters: Iran's Nuclear Program. The Risk of War and Lessons from Turkey, Middle East and Europe," International Crisis Group, Report 116, February 23, 2012, accessed December 14, 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iran/116-in-heavy-waters-irans-nuclear-program-the-risk-of-war-and-lessons-from-turkey.aspx> ; Walt, "A Riddle, Wrapped in a Mystery, Inside an Enigma..."

⁴³ Roberto Dondisch and Alcibiades Sánchez, "México ante el programa nuclear iraní," in *México en el Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU. La historia tras bambalinas*, coord. Roberto Dondisch. (Mexico: Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Debate, 2012), 70.

⁴⁴ A few days later, the United States declared his "global war on terror" and President George W. Bush included the Islamic Republic of Iran in his "axis of evil". Rumors about the border between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina (known as the triple border in Spanish) serving as a base for terrorism began to spread; allegations combined the terrorist image of Arabs or Muslims with the image of South America as a no man's land. Iran's presence in Latin America has unquestionably grown in recent years. Since Ahmadinejad took office in mid-2005, Iran opened six new embassies in Latin America: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay, in addition to the five already in existence (Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela). See: Farid Kahhat, "Percepciones actuales sobre árabes (y musulmanes) en América Latina", in *Contribuciones árabes a las identidades latinoamericanas*, ed. Lorenzo Agar et al. (Madrid, Casa Árabe, 2009), 401-413, 409; Adam Stubits, Introduction to *Iran in Latin America. Threat or 'Axis of Annoyance'?*, edited by Cynthia Arnson et al. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center of Reports on the Americas, 2007), 1-12 ; John Tofik Karam, "Crossing the Americas: The U.S. War on Terror and Arab Cross-Border

Mobilizations in a South American Frontier Region,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 251-266.

⁴⁵ Mario Arriagada, “La desencantada relación México-Estados Unidos.” *Nexos*, May 01, 2012, accessed May 5, 2012. <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=14800>. A WikiLeaks cable revealed that the U.S. Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, was told by the embassy during his visit to Mexico in late April 2008, that he would find Mexico unconcerned about Al-Qaeda and the links between Iran and Venezuela.

⁴⁶ Kayhan Barzegar, “Sanctions Won’t End Iran’s Nuclear Program.” *Foreign Affairs*, February 9, 2012, accessed August 12, 2012. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/features/letters-from/sanctions-wont-end-irans-nuclear-program>. The other resolutions were adopted in 2006 (1373), 2007 (1347), 2008 (1803 and 1835). And the American unilateral sanctions in 2000, 1985 and 1979.

⁴⁷ Roberto Dondisch and Alcibiades Sánchez, *op.cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁸ The Mexico-Iran Friendship Group in San Lazaro regretted the Mexican government’s vote and described it as a sign of subordination to U.S. interests.

⁴⁹ Olivier Roy, “Faut-il avoir peur d’Ahmadinejad?”, *Politique Internationale* 111 (2006), 199-208. As Roy notes, the only novelty was the provocation tone adopted by President Ahmadinejad. The issues of Israel and the nuclear programme had been present in Iran’s agenda since the eighties.

⁵⁰ Thus, we find that “the growing economic potential of nations in Africa and the Middle East, the strengthening of multilateral cooperation mechanisms within the UN system and plenty of non-renewable resources should be enough reasons of interest for Mexico in participating in the evolution of these important regions”.

⁵¹ To some officials whom I interviewed the determinant motivation behind this activism was the aim of decreasing Mexico's dependency with regards to North America; others, in contrast, explain this diversification as a result of the increasing numbers of both Mexican immigrants living in Arab countries and the trade exchanges, as well as the interest of the Gulf monarchies in Mexico; only a minority thinks that the activism towards the Gulf region responded first of all to Felipe Calderón's ambition play a global leadership role.

⁵² Enrique Duarte, "México debe voltear al Medio Oriente", *CNN Expansión*, November 27, 2008, accessed May 5, 2012. <http://www.cnnexpansion.com/economia/2008/11/27/medio-oriente-en-vez-de-eu-expertos>.

⁵³ Data from the Mexican Ministry of Economy, November 2011. In 2009, total trade between Mexico and the Middle East reached 1505.3 million dollars. In that year, Saudi Arabia ranked as the largest trading partner of Mexico. See: "Concluye gira de trabajo de la Canciller Patricia Espinosa por la Península Arábiga," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release no. 165, June 2, 2010, accessed August 30, 2012, <http://saladeprensa.sre.gob.mx/index.php/en/comunicados/1348-165>.

⁵⁴ "Senado ratifica a nuevo embajador de México en Kuwait y Qatar", *Notimex*, November 29, 2011. Before 2006, Mexico had diplomatic representations in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Morocco, and the Palestinian territories. During Calderon's presidency, more embassies were opened, all in the Gulf: one in the UAE (December 2011), and two more Consulates, in Manama and Sanaa.