

Mexican Foreign Policy

Jorge A. Schiavon, International Studies Department, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas

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Summary

Mexican foreign policy should be analyzed in a comprehensive and systematic way. To do so, it is necessary to study the history of Mexican diplomacy, explaining how foreign policy has been used as a central instrument for the creation and consolidation of the Mexican national sovereign state. Then, it is necessary to examine the most relevant actors and institutions involved in the decision-making process and implementation of foreign policy, evaluating their powers, capacities, and actions. Based on this, it is possible to analyze the strategies and actions of Mexican foreign policy vis-à-vis the most important regions of the world (North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, and Africa), with a special emphasis on its relationship with the United States, as well as its participation in multilateral and regional organizations.

Keywords: Mexico, foreign policy, diplomacy, foreign affairs, national interest, capabilities, foreign policy principles

Subjects: Diplomacy, Foreign Policy

Introduction

According to Velázquez and Schiavon (2019, p. 208), foreign policy is a set of decisions and actions that a state has aimed at the international environment and that are based on the national interest. These actions are determined by various internal and external conditions, including international bargaining capabilities, the nation project as defined by successive governments, national identity, and previously established values and standards of conduct. This foreign policy includes several objectives, strategies, and instruments, and its design is determined by various kinds of factors, such as economic, political, social, demographic, technological, among others. Thus, Mexico's foreign policy is the set of actions carried out by the Mexican state at the international level, based on internal and external conditions, following a series of objectives, strategies, and instruments, with the aim of achieving and maximizing its national interest.

As is the case with other countries in the world, Mexico's national interest seeks to achieve and maximize three core objectives, which, in descending order of importance, are (a) the existence and survival of the Mexican state (ensuring safety and stability), (b) national well-being (promoting economic growth and development), and (c) promoting their values (foreign

policy principles). There is a clear priority in achieving these core objectives, since, to achieve the third, it is necessary to have first achieved the second one, while this can only be obtained if the first one has been guaranteed (Velázquez & Schiavon, 2019).

Based on this argument, the foreign policy of contemporary Mexico is analyzed with an emphasis on its current situation. The article is divided into four sections. The first one makes a historical assessment, studying the most important external and internal constraints and variables, to identify its main foreign policy objectives, strategies, and instruments (Goldgeier, 2010). The second analyzes the resources and capabilities of Mexican foreign policy. The third, based on the previous two, assesses Mexico's foreign policy toward the major regions of the world. Finally, the last section evaluates the possibilities of Mexican foreign policy to promote its more effective implementation to increase its impact in world affairs.

A Brief History of Mexican Foreign Policy

Since its independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico's geostrategic location has been the most important international factor in its domestic and foreign policy. Mexico is geographically located at the southern border of the United States, the regional power in the western hemisphere since the late 19th century (after the Spanish-American War of 1898), one of the two superpowers that emerged from World War II (along with the Soviet Union), and the hegemonic power in the international system since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the face of this powerful neighbor, Mexico lost Texas in 1836 and more than half of its remaining territory because of the Mexican-American War of 1846-48 (55% of its territory, which accounts for more than 2.1 million km² (0.8 million mi²) and comprises the current states of Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma) (Schiavon et al., 2006).

Thus, given the enormous asymmetry of power vis-à-vis its northern neighbor, Mexico's most important foreign policy priority has always been to ensure its existence and security. To this end, first, it must contain, as far as possible, the United States' hegemony to achieve the first objective of its national interest: survive neighborhood with that country, retain its sovereignty, and ensure national security. Second, once this objective has been achieved, Mexico will also seek to benefit from its proximity to the world's main market and source of foreign direct investment (FDI) to promote its development and national well-being through trade and financial exchange with the United States. Finally, once these two objectives have been achieved, it will seek the international promotion of its values, enshrined in article 89-X of the Constitution as the normative principles of Mexican foreign policy, namely: self-determination, non-intervention, peaceful solution of conflicts, proscription of the threat or use of force in international relations, the legal equality of states, promotion of international peace and security, international cooperation for development, and the respect, protection, and promotion of human rights (Const., 2020, art. 89-X).

Given the United States' centrality to Mexican foreign policy, the rest of its bilateral, regional, multilateral, and global relations are directly or indirectly related to it. Thus, Mexico has implemented a triangulation strategy in its foreign policy: in defining its relations with other countries, regions, or international organizations, Mexico always considers the impact that its foreign policy actions will have on its bilateral relationship with the United States. In this way, Mexico always seeks to maintain a delicate balance in its foreign affairs by seeking a constructive relationship with its northern neighbor, but at the same time advancing its relations with other countries, regions, and international organizations to balance this bilateral relationship. All this, to maximize its safety, well-being, and the promotion of its values (Ojeda, 1984).

Starting in the 1930s, Mexico established a relatively stable political system, which substantially reduced the threat of military intervention by the United States. With its relatively guaranteed sovereignty and security, Mexico expanded its margins of autonomy to implement its domestic and external policies vis-à-vis other regions, especially Latin America and Europe, with whom it shares historical and cultural ties, but also with Asia-Pacific and, more recently, Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

In addition, since that same decade, Mexico started to become an active participant in international organizations: it was recognized as a member of the international community with its entry into the League of Nations on September 9, 1931, one of its main concerns for almost a century since its independence (between 1821 and the 1930s). Later, Mexico was a founding member of the United Nations (1945) and of every global and regional international organization in the Americas and continues to work actively within them. Its participation in international and regional organizations has been mostly legalistic in nature—defending the value of international law as a means of containing or restricting the use of force in the international system, as well as the promotion of its foreign policy normative principles. This defense of international law has been strategic when it comes to increasing the costs of U.S. interventions in the internal affairs of Mexico and other countries in Latin America (Schiavon, 2011).

Changes in Mexico's foreign policy reflect adjustments in the international and domestic systems. However, its main function has always been to serve as an instrument to maximize national sovereignty and security, as well as to promote the country's development and well-being. Similarly, when these two priorities have been achieved, Mexico has sought to promote its principles and ideals at the international level.

The Mexican Constitution states that the country's system of government is presidential and federal, with strong bicameralism (legislature divided into the Senate and Chamber of Deputies). Regarding the institutional division of powers, it is characterized as being one of the systems with the strongest formal level of separation of powers. However, for more than 70 years (1929–2000) of single-party hegemony under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico functioned as one of the most centralized political systems in the world. To understand why the Mexican president was so powerful, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between two central political actors in the system: the president, who served as

the head of the state and government, and the PRI. This centralization of presidential power was constrained with the democratization process in 2000, which still remains. From 2000 to 2018, Mexico had divided governments, where the executive did not control majorities within both chambers of the legislature. However, with the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) as president in 2018, whose coalition of parties, led by Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena), also won legislative majorities in both chambers, policy decision-making and implementation in Mexico has been centralized again, including foreign policy.

According to Weldon (1997), presidential power depends on (a) the constitutional powers enjoyed by the executive, (b) the legislative force of the president's party, (c) the discipline of party members, and (d) the competition of rivals that the president faces in his own party. Due to the authoritarian and non-competitive electoral system, from 1929 to 1997, the PRI had legislative majorities (sometimes with more than 90% of seats) in both chambers of Congress. Since the mid-1930s, the president also became, *de facto*, the undisputed leader of the party. Also, immediate reelection of legislators was banned, and the party delegated to the president the power to appoint his successor and control key nominations in the party. All this generated the president's supremacy over Congress and subnational governments. The president defined or approved PRI candidates for election positions at the state and local levels, who almost always won in non-competitive elections. The president could also freely remove the governors of the states by constitutional means through a Senate controlled by the PRI, or through negotiated resignations. This control over the 32 federal states persisted until the last years of the authoritarian regime. For example, during the administration of President Carlos Salinas (1988–1994), 16 constitutionally elected governors were removed from their posts (Ward et al., 1999).

As the almost undisputed leader of a highly disciplined party that kept the majority in both chambers of Congress for nearly 70 years, the president was virtually free of constitutional restrictions or limitations. The other key political actors in the system had strong incentives to ally with him and support his political preferences because—in the face of the ban on immediate reelection—the political future of congressmen and federal and state public officials was in his hands (Weldon, 1997). Even if there had been a *de jure* possibility of exercising veto in the Mexican institutional system by constitutionally established divisions of power, the president effectively controlled all political actors. In sum, the president had powers to define, and then implement, policies he preferred or considered desirable, including foreign policy.

As for foreign policy, the president has always had the power to appoint members of his cabinet, including the Foreign Affairs Secretary (FAS), who has traditionally been a person close to him. For example, during the administrations of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988), Carlos Salinas (1988–1994), Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), and Vicente Fox (2000–2006), no FAS was chosen from the ranks of the Mexican Foreign Service (MFS), except in the last eleven months of the Salinas government, when Ambassador Manuel Tello Macías took the place of Manuel Camacho. President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) appointed a career diplomat, Ambassador Patricia Espinosa; but Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018) returned to the previous pattern, by appointing José Antonio Meade (2012–2015), Claudia Ruiz Massieu

(2015–2017), and Luis Videgaray (2017–2018) as his FAS, all political appointees. AMLO (2018–2024) has maintained this practice, designating Marcelo Ebrard Casaubón (2018) as his FAS.

Until 2003, the MFS was the only professional civil career service—non-military—in Mexico, whose admission and promotion criteria were defined by merit, based on the results of public examinations of promotion. However, due to presidentialism, the MFS has also always been under the direct control of successive presidents. For example, a significant number of ambassadors are not diplomats with experience in foreign affairs, but political appointees of the president (between 30–40% have been political appointments since the 1990s). This situation did not change with democratization since, in the last government of the PRI (1994–2000) and during the Vicente Fox administration, the president appointed 38% and 37% of political ambassadors (data from 1998 and 2001, respectively). President Calderón set a 65–35% formula to appoint career and political ambassadors, respectively (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019b), and the governments of Peña Nieto and AMLO have maintained this criterion roughly in practice.

Due to the characteristics of the Mexican political system during the authoritarian period, the president could almost always impose his public policy preferences, because the other two branches of government were under his direct control. The president's power in foreign policy remained intact since the ratification of the 1917 Constitution, despite the process of democratization. However, because of changes in the composition of the chambers of Congress (the PRI lost its absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies in 1997, and in the Senate in 2000), the increased international activity of subnational governments (Schiavon, 2020), and decreasing party discipline, the dominance that the executive once exercised over foreign policy and international affairs was reduced since 2000, and the president could no longer impose his preferences in public policies. Between 2000 and 2018, he needed to consider international actions with other political actors, especially the legislature and subnational governments. The executive's dominance over international affairs was no longer total.

However, when the coalition led by Morena won the 2018 presidential (with the election of AMLO) and legislative elections (winning absolute majorities in both chambers of the federal Congress)—as well as in most governors' and local congresses' elections—there was a new centralization in the conduct of national politics. This, coupled with the fact that AMLO exercises *de facto* leadership over his political party without any real competition from other actors, has meant that the president's preferences materialize in legislative and public policy actions, including foreign policy, with very little limitations or participation of opposition parties. In short, after the 2018 election, Mexico looks more—politically speaking—like the period before democratization in 2000, than the period after it.

During the six-year presidential periods since the 1930s until democratization in 2000, public policies, including foreign policy, reflected the priorities and preferences of the successive presidents. Thus, Mexico followed a model of industrialization through import substitution,

with a closed economy, from the 1940s to the early 1980s. International activism varied substantially, although the priority of containing U.S. hegemony and benefiting commercially and financially from its neighborhood with the United States were always priorities.

Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940–1946), and Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946–1952) implemented active foreign policies; the first defending non-intervention in international forums, the second supporting Mexico's participation in World War II together with the allies, and the third promoting industrialization in the country. Subsequently, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952–1958) substantively reduced Mexico's participation in global affairs in the face of the rise of the Cold War. However, Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964) would substantively increase Mexico's presence in the world through his multiple international travels and the opening of new representations of Mexico abroad. Faced with internal discontent at reducing growth and well-being, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970) would again reduce the intensity of international activism.

In the 1970s, both Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976), with his foreign policy to support Third World activism, and José López Portillo (1976–1982), with his vision of power projection over Central America and the Caribbean, would increase foreign policy activism again. However, as a result of the 1982 debt crisis and the need for structural reform in the national economy to change to a neoliberal model of economic and trade openness, following an export promotion strategy, the administrations of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) focused their foreign policy actions to carry out this structural reform, the former to make the internal transformation and the latter to promote the insertion of Mexico into the world through trade openness, with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and several other free trade agreements (FTA) with other countries. Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) maintained the strategy of international economic promotion, with the negotiation and implementation of the Global Agreement between Mexico and the European Union (GA-Mex-EU) (Schiavon et al., 2006).

Thus, Mexican foreign policy has served to promote Mexico's top domestic policy priorities, defined by its successive presidents and functioning as a lever to ensure national security and development. Since democratization in 2000, the executive's capacity to control the public policy agenda was reduced. However, in the field of foreign policy, as there is very little real control of this area by Congress, presidents continued to have a significant leeway to project their national priorities internationally. In this way, Vicente Fox (2000–2006) maintained the trade openness agenda by signing a FTA with Japan, but also prioritized migration within the foreign policy agenda in his quest to establish a comprehensive migration agreement with the United States. To a large extent, this possibility was not realized because of the securitization of the international agenda following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Garza et al., 2010).

Afterward, Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) promoted the securitization of the foreign policy agenda to support his domestic policy priority: frontal combat against organized crime and drug trafficking (Garza et al., 2014). Similarly, Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018) made use of

foreign policy to promote internationally his domestic priority, the implementation of a set of second-generation structural reforms (labor, education, energy, and fiscal, among others) to promote FDI in Mexico.

Finally, the administration of President AMLO (2018–2024) has made it clear that his priority will be to focus on solving the main national problems (poverty, inequality, corruption, and insecurity, among others), declaring on several occasions that “the best foreign policy is domestic policy.” With the new concentration of power in the presidential figure, it can be expected that, in view of the executive’s low priority on international affairs, there will be a significant setback in Mexico’s activism and international presence, which was already evident with the president’s refusal to leave the country to attend such relevant international meetings as the G20 or the inauguration of sessions of the United Nations General Assembly in its 75th anniversary. In his first two years in office, AMLO only made one international trip, in July 2020, to Washington, D.C., to celebrate with President Donald Trump the initiation of the new United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), which resulted from the renegotiation of NAFTA (Covarrubias et al., 2020).

Mexican Foreign Policy Powers and Capacities

Institutions have always been an important focus in the analysis of foreign policy (Carter & Scott, 2010). The Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, SRE) is the government institution responsible for coordinating and implementing foreign policy in Mexico (LOAPF, 2020). Like any public institution, it needs to have the legal, budget, infrastructure, and staff capacities to carry out its functions optimally. Historically, the resources and capabilities of the SRE to carry out its functions have been limited, in legal (centralization of faculties), financial (budget), diplomatic infrastructure (number and size of representations abroad), as well as human resources (staff) (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019a).

For Mexico, the international factor is of great significance in its national development, as well as to promote the Mexicans’ well-being. The country’s international trade (imports plus exports) in 2017 represented more than three-quarters of the GDP (77.57%)—being one of the main domestic economic engines—due to the structural reforms initiated in the 1980s and the changes in the development model toward the promotion of FDI and exports. Along with tourism, international trade provides work directly and indirectly to millions of Mexicans. According to data from the World Bank, during the same year, the country’s international revenue reached historic levels: FDI (\$31.7 billion USD), remittances (\$30.6 billion USD), and tourist revenue (\$20.6 billion USD), together representing 7.21% of the GDP (World Bank, 2020). In addition, the presence of more than 12 million Mexicans living outside the country (98% of them in the United States), equivalent to approximately 10% of the total population, generates an important incentive to provide consular services and protect them, especially since close to half of them are in an irregular migratory situation in the United States.

To conduct its foreign affairs, as any other country (Jones, 2010), Mexico would be expected to have a foreign policy infrastructure in line with its international openness and which reflects the relevance of the external relations in terms of national security and development, as well as in the well-being of its nationals abroad. Unfortunately, investment in foreign policy resources and capabilities in Mexico has been less than what—relative to its size and relevance in the international system—would be required.

For example, in terms of budget (see Table 1), in current pesos, the budget implemented by the SRE has increased from 3.416 billion pesos in 2000 to 5.819 billion in 2006, 9.784 billion in 2012, and 14.303 billion in 2018. This means that, in absolute terms, the budget increased by 318.73% in the last three six-year terms: 70.36% with Fox, 68.14% with Calderón, and less than in the previous two administrations (46.18%) with Peña Nieto.

Table 1. Budget Implemented by the SRE (2000–2018)

Year	Thousands of current pesos	Thousands of current USD	Thousands of constant USD (2000)	Percentage of federal budget
2000	\$3,415,821.90	\$361,249.84	\$361,249.84	0.332%
2001	\$3,707,389.60	\$396,832.34	\$386,023.68	0.348%
2002	\$3,845,119.80	\$398,212.14	\$381,265.64	0.328%
2003	\$4,572,976.50	\$423,854.80	\$396,693.10	0.351%
2004	\$5,350,391.50	\$474,074.72	\$432,029.99	0.374%
2005	\$5,215,459.20	\$478,575.06	\$421,790.34	0.321%
2006	\$5,819,219.00	\$533,910.45	\$455,968.96	0.307%
2007	\$7,096,998.01	\$649,421.08	\$538,986.48	0.351%
2008	\$7,483,581.00	\$672,396.36	\$537,625.04	0.290%
2009	\$7,688,538.80	\$568,953.49	\$456,742.65	0.335%
2010	\$8,997,652.70	\$712,064.48	\$562,626.80	0.364%
2011	\$8,696,824.40	\$700,040.00	\$535,974.65	0.320%
2012	\$9,784,370.40	\$742,959.21	\$557,135.23	0.338%

Year	Thousands of current pesos	Thousands of current USD	Thousands of constant USD (2000)	Percentage of federal budget
2013	\$8,200,865.80	\$642,097.65	\$474,384.71	0.262%
2014	\$9,306,476.00	\$700,132.48	\$509,115.27	0.272%
2015	\$10,866,812.40	\$685,422.72	\$497,920.86	0.289%
2016	\$13,497,822.90	\$723,483.90	\$518,825.42	0.320%
2017	\$13,064,595.91	\$690,185.38	\$484,766.27	0.313%
2018	\$14,303,208.60	\$743,514.35	\$509,834.03	0.324%

Source: Schiavon and Figueroa (2019a). Compiled with information from the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP), transformed to USD and deflated with World Bank data (2020).

Approximately 70% of the SRE's budget is executed in foreign currencies; so, if the current dollar budget is estimated at the average exchange rate of each year, the budget went from \$361.250 million USD in 2000 to \$533.910 million in 2006, \$742.959 million in 2012, and \$743.514 million in 2018. Thus, there is a cumulative increase in the last three administrations of 105.81%: 47.80% with Fox, 39.15% with Calderón, and only 0.07% with Peña Nieto. However, considering the average annual inflation rate in the United States to deflate budgets and make them comparable in real terms, the budget implemented by the SRE went from \$361.250 million USD (2000) in 2000 to \$455.969 million in 2006, \$557.135 million in 2012, and 509.834 million in 2018. This implies that, in constant USD, the SRE budget increased by 41.13% since 2000, growing 26.22% with Fox, 22.19% with Calderón, and decreasing by 8.49% with Peña Nieto. All this means that, in real USD terms, in the administration of President Peña Nieto, the spending capacity of the SRE was reduced by almost 8.5% (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019a).

To understand the importance of foreign policy within national public policies, a good indicator would be what percentage of the total federal budget represents the budget dedicated to foreign policy. As can be seen in Table 1, in 2000, it accounted for 0.332% of the total budget, becoming 0.307% in 2006, 0.338% in 2012, and finally 0.324% in 2018. This means that the budget of the SRE, as a percentage of the total federal budget, was reduced by 2.41% in the period analyzed: down 7.42% with Fox, rising 10.06% with Calderón, and falling 4.14% with Peña Nieto.

If, in politics, priorities are reflected in the budget, the previous data shows that foreign policy has not been a national priority during the 21st century, particularly in the administration of President Peña Nieto. The international presence of Mexico and the importance of foreign affairs for the country have increased in recent years, but financial resources for foreign policy are going down in absolute and relative terms: in constant 2000 dollars for the SRE and as a percentage of the federal budget.

Regarding the coordination of foreign policy, even if the SRE has this power, many state ministries and public institutions carry out international actions, most of the time without coordination between them. For example, during the government of President Peña Nieto, ProMexico was responsible for boosting exports and attracting FDI, the Tourism Promotion Council of Mexico (CPTM) promoted the country as a tourist destination, the Ministry of Culture (SC; previously Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, CONACULTA) carried out an intense promotion of national culture globally, while the Office of the Presidency coordinated the international image and the "country brand." The Fox, Calderón, and Peña Nieto administrations did not have a comprehensive inter-ministerial mechanism through which the SRE could coordinate the actions of all these ministries and agencies.

In the field of foreign policy, profound changes have occurred since December 1, 2018: President AMLO instructed the immediate execution of some of his campaign promises when he took office (Covarrubias et al., 2020). One of these was strengthening the SRE by granting it new powers. He decided to close the Mexican trade and investment promotion (ProMexico)

and tourism (CPTM) agencies, as well as all their external offices. The Ministry of Economy closed most of its representations abroad, while the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) closed its only external office in Brussels.

The disappearance of ProMexico and CPTM forced the design of new structures and new collaboration schemes within the SRE and with other ministries. The new internal regulations of the SRE (2019) establish the creation of an executive directorate of strategy and public diplomacy, depending on the FAS. Three new general directions are also created: cultural diplomacy, tourism diplomacy, and global economic promotion. The executive directorate has the powers to design and coordinate the actions of cultural, economic, and touristic diplomacy, together with the other ministries and agencies of the federal government. The general directorate of global economic promotion serves a new strategy of economic promotion, in close connection with the SRE, based on three pillars: economic diplomacy, foreign investment, and foreign trade. Embassies and consulates are also responsible for the promotion of trade and investment, as well as tourism. By December 2021, this increase in functions has only been reflected in the internal regulations of the SRE and not in the *LOAPF* (Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration) (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019a).

Thus, with the arrival of AMLO, the SRE gained new responsibilities and launched new areas to coordinate them. However, this effort was not accompanied by more financial or human resources. The approved SRE budgets for 2019 and 2020 were, respectively, 8.54 and 8.72 billion pesos. This represents a reduction of 5.20% and 3.11% compared to the 9 billion approved for 2018 (in current pesos). This budget decline is even greater if we measure it in constant dollars from 2000: \$297.078 million USD (2000) and \$296.817 million in 2019 and 2020 respectively, compared to \$320.916 million USD (2000) in 2018, representing a decline of 7.43% and 7.45% respectively.¹

Even if there was no reduction in the number of MFS members or unionized staff with the promulgation of the Federal Law on Republican Austerity in November 2018, the wages of the mid- and top-level public officials in Mexico, including those in the SRE, were cut by 20–40% depending on the level, and the staffs of deputy secretaries and director generals were reduced to a minimum. Also, there was a reduction in the non-unionized staff of the SRE. This meant a reduction in the total personnel of the SRE, as well as a decrease in the salaries of mid- and top-level personnel in the SRE. There is no publicly available data on staff reductions at the SRE, but according to the Secretariat of the Public Service (SFP), with the reorganization of the federal government, the wages of senior management were reduced by 12–47% and 8,828 jobs were eliminated (including those of 655 deputy director generals), generating savings of 11 billion pesos in 2019 (Forbes México, 2019).

In terms of Mexico's foreign policy infrastructure, a good proxy is diplomatic and consular representation abroad, where significant limitations are also observed. There is a close relationship between the size of a country's economy and the size of its diplomatic network. According to the 2018 Global Diplomacy Index (GDI), elaborated by the Lowy Institute of Australia, the 10 largest diplomatic networks in the world (embassies only) correspond to nine of the top 10 global economies. Only Canada (10th economy) is off this list, in 15th place,

while Russia, the world's 11th economy, is in fourth position, having inherited the embassies from the former Soviet Union. Mexico has 80 embassies (2020) and ranks 28th (tied with Greece), far from its 15th place among the world's economies. In Latin America, Brazil (the world's ninth economy) has the ninth diplomatic network (137 embassies), 57 more than Mexico, while Argentina (21st economy) has five more embassies than Mexico.

In terms of regional distribution, Mexico concentrates most of its embassies in North America (2), Latin America and the Caribbean (24) and Europe (24). In Africa, its presence is weaker, with eight embassies covering 54 countries. In the Middle East, Asia, and Oceania, its embassies are present only in the 22 most economically important countries. Thus, Mexico only has embassies in 41.24% of the world's 194 countries (including Vatican City).

However, Mexico has one of the largest consular networks in the world, with 67 general and career consulates. It is the country of the G20 with the highest proportion of consulates compared to the total number of diplomatic representations (includes embassies, consulates, missions to international organizations and other diplomatic offices, like its representation in Taiwan). For the most part, consulates are concentrated in North America, with 50 being in the United States and five in Canada. Thus, adding up the total number of diplomatic representations (156), Mexico ranks 18th in the world, according to Lowy's GDI, very close to its global economic level (15th) (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019b).

Peña Nieto's administration moderately increased Mexico's diplomatic network with the opening of five new embassies, two career consulates, and the reopening of the mission to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, to approach the number of embassies that other emerging economies have, it would need to increase its diplomatic network at an average rate of five new ones a year, to match South Africa in six years, India in 10, Turkey in 11, Brazil in 12, and China in 16. In the administration of AMLO there have been, as of December 2021, no changes in the number of Mexican embassies and consulates abroad.

In terms of personnel, the SRE is the only federal ministry in which its staff is governed by different legal and administrative provisions, both national and foreign. In Mexico, the SRE has staff working under the Federal Law of State Workers, while the members of the MFS have their own regulation, the Law of the Mexican Foreign Service (LMFS). In the representations abroad—in addition to the members of the MFS—the local staff is governed by the labor laws of each country; all these personnel are the human resources of the SRE, dedicated to the implementation of foreign policy.

The Federal Public Administration Accountability Report (2006–2012), presented at the end of Calderón's government, made a detailed account of the SRE's human resources by category (SRE, 2012). Table 2 presents the status of this personnel, on November 30, 2012 and November 30, 2018 (SRE, 2018). The only missing information is that of local staff abroad.

Table 2. SRE Human Resources by Category

Category	November 30, 2012	November 30, 2018	Difference	Percentage
Non-MFS structure personnel	2,135	1,915	-220	-10.31%
Professional services contracts	105	35	-70	-66.67%
Temporary contracts	993	610	-383	-38.57%
Temporary contracts financed with external resources	148	0	-148	-100%
Subtotal without MFS	3,381	2,560	-821	-24.28%
Mexican Foreign Service (MFS)	1,430	1,487	+57	+3.99%
Total with MFS	4,811	4,047	-764	-15.88%

Source: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE, 2012, 2018).

From Table 2, several conclusions may emerge. First, regarding the workforce, excluding the MFS, during the administration of Peña Nieto, the SRE lost 821 workers and civil servants. The report of this administration systematically accounts for the implementation of various austerity measures and fiscal discipline policies that generated the reduction of staff year after year; these reductions are, by category: non-MFS structure personnel (−10.31%), professional services contracts (−66.67%), temporary contracts (−38.57%), and temporary contracts financed with external resources (−100%). Overall, this reduction is equivalent to −24.28% of non-MFS personnel. This has a significant impact on the capacities to perform foreign policy actions, since there are areas where it is not easy to increase productivity. The use of computer technology can help compensate for the loss of a secretary, but the cancellation of a position of responsibility forces another official to take over the tasks of the person who has left, substantially increasing their workload.

The Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) agreed, on the other hand, to an increase of 57 positions for the MFS, growing from 1430 to 1487, between 2012 and 2018, which represents an increase of 3.99%. Even if the positions for MFS personnel have increased to 1,487 by 2018, since 2000, the MFS members that actually use these positions has been gradually declining: from 1,367 (December 2001), down to 1,129 (December 2006), and down slightly to 1,123 (December 2012) when Peña Nieto took office. The last published figure (June 2018) is 1,128 members, five more compared to the beginning of the administration. In relation to its population, by 2020, Mexico had approximately one foreign service diplomat per 100,000 inhabitants; by comparison, in 1975, there was one for every 50,000. It is paradoxical that by 2020 Mexico had, relative to its population, 50% fewer career diplomats than 45 years before (Schiavon & Figueroa, 2019a).

The reform of the LMFS approved in April 2018 is of great relevance when it comes to improving the working conditions of the MFS personnel. These reforms were described by one of the highest-ranking and most experienced diplomats as “the largest in the last generation” (de Icaza, 2018), and sought to strengthen the three stages of diplomats’ careers: incorporation, professional development, and retirement. In addition, the reform introduces the concept of “career plan” as a tool to offer certainty in the planning of individual professional developments, considering, at the same time, the needs of the SRE. The new law strengthens, among others, gender equity, meritocratic promotion, extends retirement until the age of 70, and ensures more dignified retirement conditions.

In short, historically, the resources and capacities of the SRE have been limited. From the administration of President AMLO, the SRE acquired important coordination and implementation powers in the areas of international promotion, particularly in trade, investment, tourism, and cultural issues. However, it is necessary that these new responsibilities be legally supported, amending not only the internal regulations of the SRE, but also the LOAPF. It is also essential that the increase in functions is accompanied by the budget and human resources necessary to carry them out effectively. With an SRE with more responsibilities and fewer budget and human resources, Mexico’s capacity for international action in world affairs will be severely limited.

The Implementation of Mexican Foreign Policy

As a result of its foreign policy priorities and the restrictions on its resources and capabilities in this area, Mexico has followed a foreign policy strategy in which it seeks to maximize its limited capabilities and the constraints imposed by its neighborhood with the United States. Since the 1970s, Mexican governments have sought to project the country globally as a middle, emerging, regional, or constructive power, using these concepts interchangeably and without clearly defining them. To justify an intermediate power position, these governments use objective indicators on the importance of the country, such as its GDP, territory, population, exports, membership of international organizations, among others. The central objective of this strategy has been to present Mexico as a relevant or influential country in the international system. While the López Portillo and Salinas administrations preferred calling Mexico a middle power, Calderón preferred the concept of emerging power, while Peña Nieto used the idea of being a country with global responsibility.

Even if Mexico wants to present itself vis-à-vis the world as a country with an influence on global issues, beyond the top priority of its foreign policy—contain the United States to ensure its survival and safety, as well as benefit from the neighborhood with this country to generate development and well-being at the national level—the reality is that the country has not had a clear, long-term foreign policy strategy. Thus, in the face of low investment of resources in foreign policy capacities and the restrictions established by the relationship with the United States, historically, the country has implemented a limited foreign policy agenda, a niche diplomacy, to address the national priorities of the successive presidential administrations, but seeking some international recognition as a country that is a relevant global player, with an influence on world affairs (Covarrubias & Schiavon, 2018).

In recent decades, this international niche diplomacy has become evident at the multilateral and regional levels. For example, some of its actions within international organizations such as the United Nations have been participating in the Security Council three times during the 21st century (2002–2003, 2009–2010, and 2021–2022), and promoting the codification of international law and global cooperation in areas such as nuclear nonproliferation, disarmament, migration, human rights, and climate change, among others. It has also promoted the creation and operation of mini-lateral mechanisms of political dialogue and political cooperation, such as MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia) (Schiavon & Domínguez, 2016), regional, like the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and subregional, like Contadora. It has also created one of the largest networks of free trade agreements worldwide, with treaties with North America, the European Union, Japan, Israel, and most Latin American (highlighting the Pacific Alliance) and Pacific Basin countries (with TPP-11).

One of the strategies Mexico has used is the creation of coalitions with countries that share their interests, preferences, or ideas, through collective action, to maximize their relevance and international impact. It has also promoted global objectives that are limited at the international level, but have a high impact on Mexican politics, using foreign policy as a lever for advancing national priorities. Success in this policy has been relative given that even

though most of the time its goals have not been achieved, at least it has managed to avoid less desirable results (Covarrubias & Schiavon, 2018). For example, Mexico was not able to obtain its preferred foreign policy objectives, such as a migration agreement with the United States, nuclear nonproliferation, containment of arms trafficking, avoiding intervention without the backing of the Security Council in Iraq, the creation of semi-permanent seats in the Security Council, the application of the Rome Statute to all Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), a comprehensive agreement on climate change, a functional mechanism for political dialogue and cooperation in Latin America, and the resolution of institutional crises in Central America and Venezuela, among many others. However, in each of these cases, it has avoided less desirable results, such as the absence of international migration regulations with the signing of the Global Compact for Migration, uncontrolled nuclear proliferation with the creation of denuclearized zones and regions such as Latin America, the lack of regulation on global conventional arms trafficking, Brazil gaining a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, America's nonparticipation in PKO, the regression or disappearance of climate change negotiations, U.S. open intervention in Central America, domination of the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR) or the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) in Latin American political cooperation, among others. These have been achieved by investing its limited foreign policy resources to achieve specific foreign policy objectives that are relevant for domestic priorities.

Mexican Foreign Policy Toward the Regions of the World

How has Mexican foreign policy been implemented toward the major regions of the world and on the most relevant issues of the international agenda? The most important international relationship for Mexico has always been with the United States (Lusztig et al., 2010). This is an extremely complex relationship, because it includes practically all domestic policy areas in the bilateral agenda, and multiple actors are involved in its definition and implementation.

In terms of its relationship with the United States, Mexico has changed its role (Thies, 2010) since the 1990s; it has gone from being a distant neighbor to a close partner. On security issues, Mexico must cooperate with the United States, especially following the 9/11 attacks, which put security top in U.S. foreign policy agenda, while related issues—terrorism, organized crime, irregular migration—became more important. Mexico had to adjust to this reality, and the only way to do so was to create and consolidate cooperation mechanisms such as the Merida Initiative (Santa Cruz, 2018). The problem of drug trafficking deeply impacts both nations. If the United States remains the world's largest drug market, Mexico will continue to produce and traffic drugs (even if domestic use is on the rise in the country and has become a public health problem). Thus, both countries have created mechanisms to cooperate to contain drug trafficking; Mexico has always insisted that these strategies respect the sovereignty and dignity of both countries. The Merida Initiative was created by the George W. Bush and Calderón administrations to intensify cooperation in the security area between neighbors (Santa Cruz, 2019).

Migration is another constant source of conflict in the bilateral relationship. A primary goal of President Fox was to sign a treaty with the United States to manage bilateral migration, but this was never a real possibility, because immigration policy in the United States is congressional prerogative. Although Calderón's government reduced the centrality of migration in the bilateral agenda, it has remained a controversial issue due to the increasingly restrictive U.S. migration policy of the Obama and Trump administrations, which saw growing irregular migration flows from Central America, massive deportations, the construction of a wall on the binational border, and harsher laws that classify undocumented migrants as criminals. Mexico has added consular protection mechanisms for Mexicans in the United States, and it works with civil society organizations in the United States to challenge the constitutionality of laws that undermine the human rights of migrants.

Mexico has developed several tools and channels that allow it to exert influence in the United States, including documented migrants living and working there, the network of 50 consulates, and the discreet lobbying with U.S. lawmakers trying to convince them of the benefits that migrants generate to the U.S. economy. The goal is to achieve a comprehensive immigration reform that promotes Mexico's interests and ensures respect for the rights of its citizens residing abroad (Durand, 2018, 2019), but partisan division in the United States has not made it possible.

Donald Trump's use of anti-Mexican rhetoric in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and his subsequent triumph in the election concentrated Mexico's foreign policy actions vis-à-vis the United States even more. The relationship with the United States became the main concern of Mexican foreign policy, prioritizing the challenges involved with Trump assuming the presidency of the United States, and in particular the renegotiation of NAFTA into USMCA and the control of Central American irregular migration flow crossing Mexico to enter the United States. The Mexican government undertook cooperation actions with the United States, like using the Mexican National Guard to control the migration flows or accepting to become in practice a safe third country, where asylum seekers in the United States who entered through its southern border would remain in Mexico during the revision of their cases by U.S. courts (Santa Cruz, 2019).

President Trump's election in 2016 and the close to 75 million votes he obtained in the 2020 election are symptoms of a much deeper reality within American society. A substantive part of the electorate is dissatisfied with the political, economic, and social situation in the United States. This frustration is greater among the sectors that consider themselves losers of the globalization process, who believe that openness to the world and immigration have affected their standard of living and American culture. Reflecting this, some express a rejection of foreigners and immigrants, which often comes with racism and xenophobia, particularly against Latinos (especially Mexicans and Central Americans), Asians, Arabs, and Muslims. Moreover, Trump's statements as a candidate, and subsequently as president, made politically acceptable what until very recently was wrong and ill-seen: making public statements with racist, xenophobic, or misogynous tones.

Given the importance to Mexico of maintaining a good relationship with the United States, particularly due to Trump's triumph, this shift in American reality forced the Mexican government to act immediately and effectively to contain anti-Mexican sentiment and to ensure a functional relationship in political, economic, trade, and financial matters with the United States. The Mexican foreign policy infrastructure in the United States was used to face this challenge, particularly the existence of the largest consular network that a country has in another country, a consular protection policy with a high level of recognition worldwide, a very professional MFS with a strong vocation toward consular work, as well as a diaspora of close to 40 million people of Mexican origin living in the United States. Another favorable condition was the increasing integration in the economic, institutional, and social terms between Mexico and the United States, generated by the century-old migration flows and the growing trade and financial exchange between the two countries, which has created transnational networks in all these areas.

Throughout the years, Mexican diplomats have learned that the U.S. political system is one with the highest institutional levels of division of powers—both among federal powers and between federal, state, and local governments. Therefore, Mexican diplomacy has developed a multilevel strategy to impact U.S. politics, especially at the local level, where most of economic, political, and social activity takes place. This is summarized by the phrase attributed to Tip O'Neill, former Speaker of the House of Representatives: "all politics is local." With a very porous political, economic, and social system, with vast arrays of checks and balances, in which a very diverse society coexists, the best strategy to promote and defend the interests of Mexico and Mexicans in the United States has been a multilevel diplomacy, with local penetration, using the network of 50 Mexican consulates in the United States, prioritizing consular diplomacy and redirecting consular activity to a more proactive and organically linked role with potential partners of Mexico and Mexicans at the local level in the United States (Schiavon, 2020).

Multilevel diplomacy has been integrated by the sum of several strategies: (a) executive diplomacy (at the presidential level, with the White House and its staff); (b) administrative diplomacy (with each of the federal secretariats, executed through the homologous secretariat in Mexico); (c) parliamentary (with both chambers of federal Congress) (Velázquez & Monjaraz, 2018) and judicial diplomacy (with the U.S. court system); (d) local diplomacy (with government authorities at the state and local levels) (Schiavon, 2020); (e) regional diplomacy (taking advantage of the North American Leaders' Summit); (f) citizen and public diplomacy (strengthening relations with transnational corporations, NGOs, universities, and media, trade union and religious organizations) (Cárdenas, 2018; Velázquez & Farfán, 2018; Villanueva, 2018, 2019); and (g) consular and diaspora diplomacy (through the consular network and representatives of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) (Cárdenas, 2019). Due to this multilevel diplomacy, the SRE concentrates almost half the budget and personnel to sustain its foreign policy infrastructure in North America, especially the United States, both at the embassy and consular network level, to establish strategic alliances with those political, economic, and social actors whose interests and preferences are aligned with those of Mexico and Mexicans, and to impose costs on those who oppose them.

In terms of the consular network, in addition to carrying out the traditional functions of this branch, such as documentation, protection, and relations with the diaspora, consulates also participate in multilevel diplomacy, which is nothing more than the art and practice of negotiations to represent and ensure Mexico's national interests before the different relevant actors in the United States, particularly at the local level. To do this, they implement several actions. First, they conduct nontraditional activities at the consulate level, such as investment, commercial, tourism, and image promotion, as well as cooperation in education, scientific, and technological areas. Second, they consolidate consular information through a centralized system, in which all relevant stakeholders' information and relations conducted at each of the network's 50 consulates is concentrated. Third, consulates follow basic protocols to identify relevant actors, as well as to capture and systematize the information about them and the contacts and relations established.

Fourth, through public diplomacy, they identify the main allies and detractors of the interests and rights of Mexico and Mexicans in the United States, at the public, private, social, academic, religious and trade union sectors at the local level. This strategy is used to strengthen ties and work together with allies, strengthening their capabilities, as well as generating costs to detractors in their possible actions against the interests of Mexico and Mexicans to create incentives to moderate or not carry out their actions. It also seeks to use public diplomacy at the consular level to inform those who are not allies or detractors, but indifferent persons, about the relevance of Mexico and Mexicans for the well-being of the United States and its citizens, to eventually turn them into allies or, at least, to prevent them from becoming detractors.

Fifth, all the information generated is centralized at the Mexican Embassy in Washington and the Undersecretariat for North America in Mexico City, where it is analyzed to define coordinated and strategic actions of consular diplomacy. Sixth, the SRE identifies and documents good practices of specific consulates and, as far as possible, tries to systematize and replicate them in other consulates in the network. Seventh, the SRE appoints, most of the time, consuls in the United States whose profile reflects a clear vocation and knowledge of consular work and local diplomacy; they are trained in the legal and institutional foundations of Mexico's foreign policy and its consular action, as well as the functioning of the political, legal, economic, and social system of the United States and the region and locality to which they are designated. Finally, eighth, by law, consular revenue derived from the provision of consular services, like documentation, is reintegrated by the Mexican Treasury into the SRE, to conduct more consular services (Schiavon, 2018).

In sum, multilevel diplomacy is a priority for Mexican foreign policy, as the SRE invests close to half of its budget and personnel in diplomatic and consular affairs in North America, especially the United States, to promote a better understanding of the importance of Mexico and Mexicans to the United States and its well-being and, therefore, to foster a better understanding and better and more productive relations between the two countries. This has allowed Mexican foreign policy to contain U.S. hegemony and intervention in Mexican affairs since the 1940s, as well as to benefit from trade and investment with its neighbor, the largest market and source of FDI in the world for many decades (Schiavon, 2018).

Mexico has developed partnerships with other countries and regions to balance its bilateral relationship with the United States. In Latin America, the actions to be perceived as a regional leader have been useful to achieve a global position as a bridge between the world and the region (Below, 2010). However, in recent years, Mexico's presence and influence in Latin America has deteriorated. At the beginning of Fox's government, Mexico undertook several foreign policy projects in Latin America, but at the end of its period it became clear that Mexico was distancing itself from the region, as the diplomatic conflicts with Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela occurred. Felipe Calderón managed to reverse this situation, especially with Cuba and Venezuela, and since then relations with Latin American countries have remained stable and have facilitated the implementation of regional initiatives, such as the creation of CELAC, a hemispheric political dialogue and cooperation mechanism that excludes the United States and Canada. Due to increasing political polarization and nationalism in the region, concrete actions and results of CELAC's work have been scarce, particularly in finding solutions to the most relevant constitutional and political crisis in the region, like Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and especially Venezuela.

The natural area of Mexican influence has been Central America, since its stability is a priority for Mexico's national security in the face of the growing influx of goods, services, and people, both legal and illegal. Mexico has tried to help solve some of the economic and security problems in the region through cooperation mechanisms. Specifically, it has concentrated almost all its international cooperation in Central America through the creation of the Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AMEXCID) to boost economic growth and social programs. Mexico has also prioritized its relations with the Pacific Alliance countries (Chile, Colombia, and Peru), by maintaining strong relations based on cooperation and economic integration. In short, despite the polarization that characterizes this region, since the 2010s, Mexico is gradually strengthening its position in Latin America after almost a decade of diplomatic disputes and a limited interest (González & Morales, 2019).

According to González and Morales (2018), Mexican foreign policy still must rethink the region in all its complexity and heterogeneity, analyzing it not as a well-articulated region but as three subregions with different dynamics and priorities, where Mexico must put on different thematic accents. These experts recommend some possible actions. First, in the Caribbean, to reduce Venezuela's influence, to open spaces for a greater Mexican presence that can be relocated into a global projection with a solidarity profile, particularly in countries such as Belize, Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia, where Mexican investments can also be promoted. Second, the regional priority must be Central America, especially on security, migration, and cooperation areas, where synergies must be sought with other international actors, such as the United States, Canada, and the European Union, and international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN. Finally, third, in South America, Mexico must use the material and institutional density accumulated by Mexican investments, strategic partnerships, trade and complementation agreements, especially boosting the Pacific Alliance,

promoting issues of integral and sustainable development, strengthening CELAC, and taking a firm, proactive, and constructive position to solve crisis situations in the region with humanitarian costs, such as Bolivia and Venezuela, among others.

As for its relationships with the rest of the world (Europa, Asia, and Africa), Mexico has played a role of promoter of free trade, investment, and international cooperation. Relations with Europe have been based on a strategy to diversify trade and investments, since Europe has been a key source of foreign investment and both a real and potential market for its exports (Ruano, 2019). For Ruano (2018), Mexico faces several challenges in the region. First, concluding the European Parliament and the national legislatures' ratification of the renegotiated Global Agreement between Mexico and the European Union (GA-Mex-EU), ensuring its compatibility with USMCA. Second, implementing an industrial policy in Mexico to take better advantage of the GA-Mex-EU. Third, not allowing that the negotiations with the EU weaken relations with individual member states, many of them important political allies of Mexico, especially France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The Asia-Pacific region has become the most dynamic commercial and financial zone in the world and thus it is a strategic area for Mexico's economic relations. In this region, Mexican foreign policy has strengthened its trade and investment relations, using its free trade agreements signed with the most relevant countries in the Pacific Basin, to promote its exports and attract FDI. It has also reinforced its participation in various regional cooperation mechanisms, like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, and the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Leaders' Forum. The objective has been to diversify its economic relations and achieve a better position in the region (Cornejo, 2019).

Mexico's relationships within the Asia-Pacific region have been a space to diversify its economic relations. However, Mexico has not taken advantage of greater business opportunities by deepening its diplomatic ties with the area (Uscanga, 2018). According to Uscanga (2018, 2019), the agenda involving Mexico and Asia-Pacific in economic, cultural, diplomatic, and financial issues is increasingly comprehensive and includes multiple actors (particularly nongovernmental). The expert believes that Mexico can become a more relevant player in the region if it implements some foreign policy actions. First, it must contribute to the institutional reform of APEC. Second, it must actively participate in the regional and global international organizations using the MIKTA coordination mechanism, promoting actions of cooperation and cultural diplomacy. Third, it needs to foster new strategic alliances to take advantage of new market access and investment opportunities, promoting a climate of security and trust with its trading partners. Finally, it could promote the expansion of Asian countries as associate members in the Pacific Alliance.

In the case of the most powerful country in the region, Cornejo (2018, 2019) argues that China-Mexico relations have deteriorated with the cancellation of several major Chinese investment projects in Mexico during the Calderón and Peña Nieto administrations. To profit

from this relationship, the expert believes that strengthening the relations with this country should be a priority, to benefit from its science and technology, as well as its financial resources for investment in infrastructure projects in Mexico and the export of commodities.

Relations with Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia have not been a priority for Mexico's foreign policy historically. Faced with the multiple economic, political, and social conflicts in these regions, Mexico has tried to reassess its relations with these countries, while trying to promote peace and international security. Mexico's foreign policy strategy has been to advance its presence in these regions through multilateral forums that promote and support initiatives to mitigate conflict and promote cooperation. Marta Tawil (2018, 2019) believes that domestic factors have determined the discourse and practice of foreign policy toward these regions, and that continuity has been observed in foreign policy lines and objectives over the last decades. Tawil argues that the restructuring of the international system, as well as the deepening of political crises and human tragedy in the Middle East, represent an opportunity for Mexico to take a more coherent and proactive role in that region. To do so, she thinks that several specific actions are necessary. First, increasing the budget and personnel of the directorate-general for Africa and the Middle East and the Mexican diplomatic representations in these countries. Second, increasing the Mexican presence in multilateral forums to advance common agendas with these countries and gain their support for joint initiatives. Third, expanding Mexico's presence in Arab countries beyond the Gulf and the government level, and promoting cultural exchanges and the participation of the private and social sectors. Finally, addressing the Palestinian issue as a regional problem. In short, Mexico needs to understand the Middle East, without prejudice or reducing the complex reality of Arab and Muslim societies to an imprecise and sometimes negative image, thus developing a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond the economic issues and government actors.

In the case of Africa, since it has shown some potential for economic growth in the last decades, Mexico opened two additional embassies in the continent during the last decade to reach a small number of eight to conduct the relations with 54 countries. Its main objectives are to promote cooperation, trade, and financial agreements, as well as to protect the interests of Mexicans living in the region. Closer relations with countries in Africa could generate support for Mexican initiatives to promote international law in global organizations (Varela Barraza, 2018, 2019). However, Varela underlines that Africa has been mostly absent from the Mexican foreign policy agenda and public opinion. She finds that there is a continuity in Mexico's pattern of behavior toward the continent, always having a low profile and limited actions. Over the last six decades, foreign policy toward Africa has been reactive, erratic, and without strategic planning. In the last three presidential administrations, there was no high-level contact between Mexico and its main African allies: Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, among others. Thus, Varela argues that even if Africa is not a priority region for Mexico, it cannot be ignored either. She therefore believes that Mexico should become a reliable and not simply an elusive partner, both in multilateral forums and in terms of bilateral relations, and that the expansion of the diplomatic network in the region could be done through joint representations with other Latin American countries, especially with Pacific Alliance countries.

Finally, in terms of international organizations, Mexico has been an active advocate of international law and multilateral cooperation since the end of World War II. Since 2000, it has held three times a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council and hosted several world summits. Three former Foreign Affairs Secretaries have held important positions in the international arena: Bernardo Sepúlveda as a justice and vice president of the International Court of Justice, José Angel Gurría as secretary general of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and Patricia Espinosa as executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Mexican government has strengthened its presence in multilateral forums marginally in the last decades. Within the framework of the UN, Mexico has historically defended the principles of nonintervention, self-determination, peaceful solution of disputes, global peace and security, and international cooperation. With the democratization in 2000, it has also supported the global promotion of human rights and democracy. In terms of specific actions and strategies, it has played a leadership role in the codification of international law in strategic areas for domestic politics, such as migration, nuclear nonproliferation, climate change, arms trafficking, and money laundering. In addition, it actively participates in specialized agencies of the UN: UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), among others (Pellicer, 2019). However, due to the limited resources invested in foreign policy, it has followed a niche diplomacy, choosing to participate in those multilateral forums that advance the cooperation in issues of national relevance. It also does coalition building with countries with similar interests as a strategy to increase its bargaining power in these issues.

According to Covarrubias (2019), Mexico strategically participates in the UN and OAS to influence the construction of global governance, consistent with the objective of making Mexico an actor with global responsibility. She considers that Mexico's capacity to have an impact in some issues globally is limited by domestic variables, like the internal violation of human rights, corruption, and national problems with consolidating the rule of law and democracy.

Except for the AMLO administration, Mexico has actively participated in the G20, playing the role of an emerging power that defends the interests of developing countries while promoting international agreements to contain the effects of global financial and health crises. In addition, with the creation of MIKTA in the Peña Nieto administration, Mexico has tried to promote global governance with other countries with similar priorities, such as Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and Australia. Mexico has also been an active member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), always defending a free and open international trade regime. According to Zamudio (2018), Mexico's strategic multilateral foreign policy has chosen to which organizations to belong, defining concrete strategies and actions to promote domestic priorities.

In sum, Mexico has played different roles vis-à-vis different regions of the world: partner of the United States; leader in Latin America; defender of free trade (de la Mora, 2018, 2019), investment, international cooperation (Prado, 2018), peace and security (Chabat, 2018, 2019), the environment (López Vallejo, 2018; Torres, 2019), and human rights (Anaya, 2018, 2019) in Europe, Asia, and Africa; as well as promoter of international law and international organizations to advance its domestic priorities. However, there has been a gap between the image and the role it projects to the world and its domestic reality, since its defense of international law, peace and security, human rights, and the rule of law clashes with the deep national challenges in these same areas.

In short, it was not unwillingness that restricted Mexico's relevance and influence in global affairs, but the limitations on investment of resources to generate greater foreign policy capabilities, the constraints imposed by its neighborhood with the United States, and the absence of a strategic and long-term foreign policy project. With its limited resources and capabilities, it achieved the objectives of containing the hegemony of the United States in Mexican domestic affairs, but without reducing the restrictions imposed by the neighborhood; managing political crises in Central America and Latin America, but not achieving lasting and long-term solutions; avoiding Brazil's diplomatic domination in Latin America, but not establishing itself as a regional leader; acquiring a global presence through its actions at the United Nations, but without having the power to achieve major structural changes; gaining recognition as an emerging power through MIKTA, but without executing any high-impact collective action through this mechanism; being a facilitator in the negotiations on nuclear nonproliferation, conventional arms trafficking control, and climate change, but without having the capacity to reach a major global agreement. Thus, using these foreign policy strategies, Mexico has managed to have a greater, albeit limited, relevance and impact in regional and global issues that advance national priorities, than if it had acted individually; it has also provided the country with a reputation as a reliable partner to advance those issues that are relevant following the logic of the national priorities of different presidential administrations.

The Future of Mexican Foreign Policy

At a complex post-Covid-19 international juncture, where protectionist tendencies are reinforced in the world, left- and right-wing populist choices gain ground internationally, confidence in multilateral institutions has shrunk, the anti-Mexican sentiment does not yield in major U.S. sectors, and the challenges at its border with Central America are growing, Mexico needs to strengthen its foreign policy capabilities and strategies. Due to its size, economy, and exports, the country has some relevance in the international system. Since it has a professional foreign service, increasing the resources and capabilities of foreign policy could generate a greater impact in world affairs to advance the Mexican national interest: its security, prosperity, and promotion of its principles. To become a relevant international and regional player, Mexico needs to strengthen its foreign policy capacities by substantively increasing the budget of the SRE and enhancing its coordination powers in international

affairs to implement a comprehensive, coherent, and consistent foreign policy at the global level, for the management of the complex relationship with the United States and other regions. It would also need to legally define these powers in national legislation in the areas of trade and investment, tourism, and cultural promotion.

Foreign policy infrastructure is also necessary to conduct an effective foreign policy. Thus, it is essential to not only increase the number of MFS members, but also improve Mexico's diplomatic coverage of the world, increase the number of embassies to the level of other emerging countries, and geographically diversify their location. This must be done together with strengthening the consular network in the United States to increase multilevel diplomacy, to expand and deepen strategic alliances, in all sectors and levels of government.

In its relations with other regions of the world, Mexican foreign policy must rethink the Latin American region in all its complexity and heterogeneity, analyzing it as three subregions with different dynamics and priorities. With Europe, it needs to promote the ratification of the GA-Mex-EU, carefully avoiding that the relations with the EU do not displace strategic bilateral relations with its member countries. In Asia-Pacific, it has to contribute to the institutional reform of APEC and expand regional dialogue and political concertation spaces, extending cooperation and cultural diplomacy actions to forge new strategic alliances in commercial and financial matters; in particular with China, bilateral relations must be revamped, to build on its science and technology capacity, its financial availability for investment in infrastructure projects in Mexico, and its agricultural and mineral product needs. Mexican presence in the Middle East and Africa should expand beyond government actors, promote cultural exchanges, and pursue cooperation in international organizations with like-minded countries of the region. Finally, within multilateral and regional organizations, it must define the strategies and actions to advance a niche diplomacy in those areas which are relevant for domestic priorities, but also reduce the gap between international commitments and national compliance.

In sum, Mexican foreign policy has been a very important policy instrument to promote the consolidation and security of the Mexican state, as well as to advance its economic development and welfare, and, to some extent, the promotion of Mexican values and principles abroad. It has been very successful in containing U.S. hegemony since the 1930s, as well as benefiting from being the neighbor of the largest economy and source of FDI since the 1940s. It has promoted a diversification strategy of its international affairs with other regions of the world and within regional and multilateral organizations to balance its relationship with the United States. Due to the limited resources invested in foreign policy in terms of budget, personnel, and representations abroad, it has, on the one hand, concentrated approximately half of them in administering its relations with North America, especially the United States (having a network of 50 consulates in this country), on the other hand, it has deployed a limited diversification strategy with other regions of the world, mostly with Latin America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific, leaving Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia as non-priorities. Finally, it has implemented a niche strategy in regional and international organizations, promoting cooperation in those issue areas that are relevant for domestic politics, creating coalitions with like-minded countries to pursue its interests. Based on the structural

constraints established by the United States and the limited resources invested in foreign policy, it can be argued that Mexican foreign policy has been relatively successful in promoting national security, prosperity, and development since the 1930s.

Links to Digital Materials

Mexican diplomatic history and documents. The Mexican Diplomatic Archive (Acervo Histórico Diplomático <<https://acervo.sre.gob.mx/>>) of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE). Source to publications, documents, treaties, and diplomatic materials of the SRE (1821–2021), many of them digitalized. Access to catalogues of SRE libraries: Biblioteca José María Lafragua <<http://catalogoacervo.sre.gob.mx:8090/SRE1>>, Acervo Histórico Genaro Estrada <<https://acervo.sre.gob.mx/index.php/catalogos-electronicos?id=213>>, and the photo library Amalia González Caballero <<http://catalogoacervo.sre.gob.mx:8097/SRE4>>, and the digital library of international relations <<https://acervo.sre.gob.mx/index.php/biblioteca-digital-de-relaciones-internacionales>>.

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Notes

1. Calculated with the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) information and transformed to USD and deflated with World Bank data (2020).

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