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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

25 September 1986

Shevardnadze Visits Mexico:  
Working Moscow's Agenda

Summary

Heightened Soviet diplomatic activity in Mexico over the last two years will accelerate this fall with Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's trip to Mexico City. The trip will occur against a backdrop of intense Soviet efforts to court Mexican media

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The Foreign Minister's visit apparently was initiated by Moscow for the primary purpose of laying the groundwork for a Gorbachev visit to Mexico next year. It has, however, a major diplomatic value in its own right. Besides possibly leading to the signing of cultural and diplomatic protocols, Shevardnadze's visit is aimed at bolstering some major Soviet objectives in bilateral relations with Mexico, including:

- o Stimulating Mexico to step up flagging diplomatic support for Nicaragua and other regional revolutionary movements.
- o Encouraging Mexico's participation in the international "peace" movement, especially the Group of Six. One result of the visit could be a joint statement endorsing peace and disarmament.

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Office of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Third World Activities Division,

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- o Maintaining strong bilateral ties in hopes of continuing a valuable indirect benefit-- [redacted]

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[redacted] Shevardnadze may, for example, press a longstanding Soviet request for a new consulate on the US-Mexican border. [redacted]

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While seeking progress in these areas, Moscow probably does not believe the visit will result in any breakthroughs. Mexico's current heavy economic dependence on the United States is likely to limit Soviet ability to influence Mexico's regional policy and discourage Mexico from blatantly anti-US behavior. Mexico probably will also still balk at establishing a Soviet consulate along the border. [redacted]

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#### Shevardnadze's Objectives

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's trip to Mexico City in early October will feature the highest ranking Soviet delegation to visit Mexico since 1959. The visit clearly signals the priority Moscow assigns to strengthening the relationship and will follow an increasingly well-worn path. Over the last four years, the frequency of parliamentary delegation exchanges has roughly tripled and has included visits by the Soviet Ministers of Culture and Trade, Ambassadors-at-Large, and other high-ranking officials. In January and February 1986, the chief of the Foreign Ministry's First Latin American Department made two closely spaced visits, delivering a letter from Gorbachev to Mexican President de la Madrid and, according to press reports, discussing various international issues, including the situation in Central America. Moscow also sent a Supreme Soviet delegation in April to discuss Mexico's role as an organizer of the Five Continent Peace Initiative--the Group of Six, which includes Mexico, Tanzania, Argentina, Greece, Sweden, and India--and followed that with a second such delegation in July. [redacted]

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While the principal rationale for the trip probably is to firm up a Gorbachev visit next year, we expect the Soviet Foreign Minister to focus on several themes during his visit. [redacted]

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Support for Contadora. Support for Mexican involvement in the Contadora process has been a major theme in Moscow's propaganda, and we expect Shevardnadze to work the subject into his public and private discussions. The Soviets began

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[redacted]

in 1983 to display increasing eagerness to have Mexico play a larger regional role in Central America, hoping to build up regional pressure against the United States to force it into a less "interventionist" stance in the area [redacted]

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[redacted] But Moscow came to its position of supporting the Contadora process somewhat slowly; throughout 1983 and early 1984, the Mexican Ambassador to Moscow repeatedly requested more public Soviet support of the Contadora peace initiative. The Soviets at first demurred, declaring that overt Soviet backing might sabotage Contadora's legitimacy as a regional initiative, according to Embassy reporting. By mid-1984, however, a visiting Soviet delegation issued a joint communique with the Mexican Government endorsing the Contadora process--if not every detail of the Contadora proposals--as a route to peace in Central America. The delegation was featured prominently in Pravda and Izvestiya, and Soviet academic journals began to publish articles supporting Contadora. As US criticism of Nicaragua increased, the Soviet press increasingly praised Mexico's role as a regional peacemaker while disparaging what it termed US efforts to pressure Mexico into distancing itself from the Sandinistas. [redacted]

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The upturn in Soviet enthusiasm for Mexican involvement in regional affairs took place, however, at a time when Mexico's enthusiasm for it was waning. Driven by the economics of a disintegrating economy dependent on US financial support, Mexico's growing disenchantment with the course of the Sandinista revolution, and the new Mexican President's more conservative bent, Mexico began backing away from its support of Nicaragua in 1982 and has more recently backed away from, although not abandoned, Contadora as well. [redacted]

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Plugging Arms Control. Another standard line in Soviet propaganda in Latin America--one we expect Shevardnadze to press--is the need for countries in the region to be active in supporting arms control positions favored by the USSR. As a member of the Group of Six that is urging the superpowers to pursue nuclear disarmament, Mexico is likely to provide a receptive audience. Both Soviet and Mexican media have devoted extensive coverage to Mexico's participation in the Group's disarmament initiative. Moscow has used the issue to play to Mexico's aspirations as a Third World leader, to tout its own nuclear test ban, and to portray the United States as a nuclear superpower bent on sustaining hegemony over the Western hemisphere. [redacted]

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Roosting Moscow at Washington's Expense. We assume Shevardnadze will also attempt to discredit the United

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States by playing up what Moscow characterizes as traditional Soviet-Mexican affinities--a common revolutionary heritage and mutual opposition to US "interventionist" policies. Soviet-Mexican diplomatic relations were established in 1924 in part because of Mexico's determination to demonstrate its independence from the United States and Moscow's desire to gain international legitimacy wherever possible and to establish its influence in the Western hemisphere. The same impulses, in our judgment, continue at least partially to affect relations between Mexico and the Soviet Union today. [redacted]

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[redacted] Last year, however, de la Madrid denied a Soviet request for a port visit by two Soviet warships, apparently to avoid aggravating the United States. [redacted]

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#### Working the Mexican Media

In pushing these lines, Shevardnadze will be working against a backdrop of stepped-up Soviet Bloc activity in recent years to increase Moscow's influence in the Mexican media and among Mexican elites in general. [redacted]

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The Soviet press corps in Mexico has meanwhile nearly doubled this year, increasing from eight to 15 [redacted] [redacted] and Soviet influence in the Mexican media is apparently extensive. Soviet wire services routinely place about 10 articles a day in local newspapers, including the official government paper, El Nacional, and the most influential daily, Excelsior. Both papers together reach a wide spectrum of Mexican elites. [redacted]

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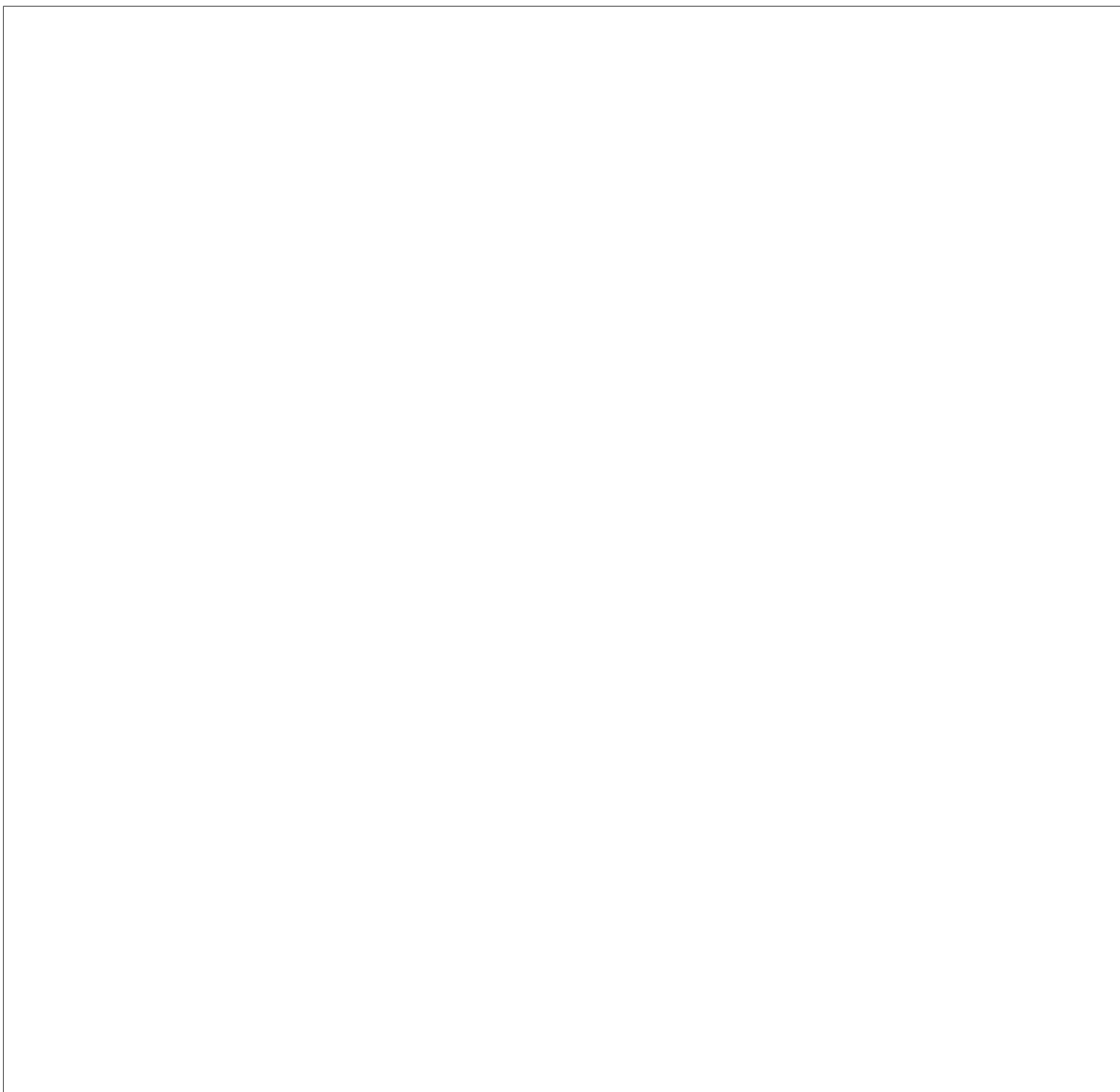
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[REDACTED]

The Soviets have also stepped up their efforts to discredit the United States by playing up US-Mexican discord in Soviet media, through placements in Mexican media, and through diplomatic channels. The Soviet Ambassador, who is widely quoted by the Mexican press, has frequently criticized Washington--in particular charging that it has used the drug problem to interfere in Mexico's internal political affairs. More recently, Soviet media have portrayed the United States Senate hearings on Mexico as an attempt to punish Mexico for its independent foreign policy. According to the US Embassy in Mexico City, the Soviets are also behind recent stories in the Mexican press alleging that US nuclear testing was responsible for the earthquakes Mexico experienced in September 1985. [REDACTED]

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Other Targets for Influence

Outside the ruling party, Moscow's range of contacts is extensive, but--probably to avoid undermining friendly relations--the Soviets do not openly court subversives and revolutionaries who, they currently judge, have little chance of success.

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The USSR, along with Cuba and Bloc countries, is also trying to create a bridge to Mexican students and youth through university contacts, academic exchanges, and scholarships. The Soviets maintain an active academic exchange program--sending at least 10 Soviet professors a year to Mexico for six-month exchanges, as well as others who attend conferences throughout the year. Soviet academic contacts with Mexico center on the National Autonomous University (UNAM), which most Soviet exchange students attend,

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[Redacted] Mexican academics occasionally travel to Moscow on exchange as well, and a number of Mexican faculty members at UNAM received their training in the USSR, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Soviet scholarship efforts have been less successful. A small number of Mexican students study on exchange in the USSR, and the US Embassy reports that the Mexican Government has stipulated that only graduate students may participate in such exchanges on the grounds that undergraduates are less mature and too easily influenced. [Redacted]

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As with Soviet missions elsewhere in the Third World, Moscow's presence in Mexico is far beyond the size necessary to conduct official political, cultural, and economic functions. Soviet-Mexican economic relations, for example, total less than 1 percent of Mexico's annual foreign trade, but the Soviets have 42 commercial officers in Mexico. Moscow's diplomatic presence, meanwhile, continues to expand, growing from 129 to 147 official representatives in the past year. The Soviets have also made repeated requests for additional consulates in the border towns of Tijuana and Mexicali--a request the Foreign Minister may reiterate during his visit. The sole purpose of such posts, if established, would be to serve as intelligence outposts on the US border. The Mexicans have denied these requests, probably out of concern over the US reaction, but have

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allowed the Soviets to set up a consulate in the coastal resort city of Veracruz.

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Outlook

Although Shevardnadze will press Soviet policy aims across the entire spectrum of issues, Moscow probably does not expect the visit to bring any diplomatic breakthroughs. Ostensibly, the visit appears calculated to reaffirm Soviet-Mexican ties and provide a forum for mutually admiring rhetoric on disarmament. Yet, despite the visit and the Soviets' broad-based efforts to influence Mexico's regional policy, Mexico's economic dependence on the United States remains beyond Moscow's control and places a check on how far Mexico will go to accommodate a specific Soviet wish list. [Redacted]

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The Soviets, meanwhile, will continue to play on US-Mexican discord in the media and among Mexican elites in an attempt to discredit the United States and undermine its influence. This tactic, combined with diplomatic gestures

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that appeal to Mexico's desire to be recognized as an important hemispheric and global actor, will maintain and perhaps strengthen relations, especially if US-Mexican tensions continue to grow over sensitive issues such as narcotics trafficking, electoral fraud, and Central America. [REDACTED] Mexico is unlikely to grant Moscow a new consulate along the US-Mexican border in the near future,

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Ambassador Jack Matlock, Jr.  
Special Assistant to the President  
USSR-Eastern Europe  
NSC  
Room 368, Old EOB

Raymond F. Burghart  
Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director  
for Latin American Affairs  
NSC  
Room 391, Old EOB

William Perry  
Director for Latin American Affairs  
NSC  
Room 395, Old EOB

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Senior Director, Policy and Development  
NSC  
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Intelligence Coordination  
NSC  
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NSC  
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NSC  
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NSC  
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NSC  
Room 391, EOB

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Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs  
Room 6226, Department of State

Elliott Abrams  
Assistant Secretary for Latin  
American Affairs  
Room 7802, Department of State

Ambassador Morton I. Abramowitz  
Director  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research  
Room 6531, Department of State

Steve Coffey  
Special Assistant to the Under Secretary  
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Room 7240, Department of State

William G. Walker  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
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Room 6263, Department of State

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US Ambassador to the United Nations  
US Mission to the UN  
Department of State

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Organization Affairs  
Room 6323, Department of State

William H. Courtney  
Office of International Security Policy  
Bureau of Political-Military Affairs  
Room 7244, Department of State

Special Assistant to the Under Secretary  
of State Security Assistance, Science  
and Technology  
Room 1206, Department of State

Richard N. Holwill  
Director of Caribbean Affairs  
Bureau of InterAmerican Affairs  
Room 3248, Department of State

Henry S. Myers  
Executive Assistant to the Director, INR  
Room 6531, Department of State

Jerome H. Kahan  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
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Intelligence and Research Bureau  
Room 6535, Department of State

Mark R. Parris  
Director of Soviet Union Affairs  
Bureau of European Affairs  
Room 4217, Department of State

Robert H. Baraz  
Director, INR/SEE  
Room 4758, Department of State

Wayne Limberg  
Chief, INR/SEE/FP  
Room 4843, Department of State

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Director, Policy Planning Staff  
Room 7311, Department of State

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INR-IS  
Room 6510A, Department of State

Robert Fouche  
Director, INR/IAA  
Room 7538, Department of State

David G. Smith  
Chief, INR/IAA/MAC  
Room 7637, Department of State

Arthor P. Shankle, Jr.  
Director, Mexico  
Bureau of Inter-American Affairs  
Room 4258, Department of State

Everett Briggs  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of Inter-American Affairs  
Room 6263, Department of State

DOD

Darnell Whitt  
Intelligence Adviser to the Under  
Secretary of Defense for Policy  
Room 4D840, Pentagon

Col. David R. Brown  
Executive Secretary  
Office of the Secretary of Defense  
Room 3A948, Pentagon

Nestor D. Sanchez  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
for Inter-American Affairs  
Room 4C800, Pentagon

Col. John A. Cash  
DIO for Latin America  
Defense Intelligence Agency  
Room 2C238, Pentagon

[Redacted]

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DoD

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Defense Intelligence Agency  
JS1-2C  
Room 1C294, Pentagon

:

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Dr. Wynfred Joshua  
DIO for European and Soviet Political  
and Military Affairs  
Defense Intelligence Agency  
Room 2C238, Pentagon

NSA

GCO/NSA  
PO 532  
2W1111 Fort Meade, Md.

D/NSA Special Assistant  
[Redacted] Q42  
Room 9A171, Fort Meade, Md.

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Other

DIA/RTS-2C2  
Bolling AFB

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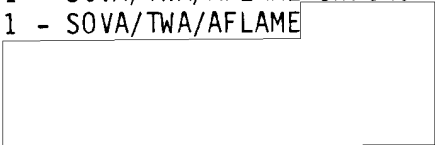


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