

ence in these isolated areas, it forced peasants to decide whether to stay in the patrols and cut their links to the guerrillas or to join the rebels permanently. Most stayed in the patrols. The union leader called the patrols instruments of repression and said they were used to capture cooperative and union leaders. He said patrol chiefs often abused their power to personal advantage, sometimes even collecting road tolls at night.

It is precisely in such areas of national security that the civilian government will have least power. The guerrilla movement has been largely defeated, but there are still confrontations between rebels and military patrols. The latest U.S. travel advisory in April warned Americans against visiting certain areas of the country, explaining that "a well-organized insurgency is active in the northwestern highlands, the western Peten and to the south of Lake Atitlan." It is not likely that the army will do anything it thinks would weaken its counter-insurgency strategy.

However, foreign observers and politicians, such as UCN leader Jorge Carpio Nicolle and Cerezo, see objective reasons why the army will at least get out of running the government. Carpio Nicolle, publisher of two of the four daily newspapers, says, "It is impossible to be an autocratic government again, because all the world is against it. Image means loans, political help, and arms. We cannot be the pariahs of the international community." But he added that the constitution would not deviate far from what the army was willing to support.

Said Cerezo, "It's not a question just of the good will of the army, but a question of political and economic circum-

stances. The country is in a critical economic crisis. It needs to take drastic measures or it will have to devalue the quetzal and have a crisis that will hurt the prestige of the army." And the Guatemalan military, he added, has learned a lesson from what happened to the military in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Lucy Komisar is a free-lance journalist who has recently spent several months in Central America.

EXCURSUS 3

Aaron Segal on U.S./MEXICO BORDER WOES

The 1900 miles of serpentine border separating the United States and Mexico wind mostly through desert and sagebrush country, sparsely populated and easily dismissed. Between San Diego and Tijuana at the Pacific end of the border and Brownsville and Matamoros at the Gulf, there are seventeen twin cities and towns. Here four million Mexicans and two million Americans, 60 per cent of whom are of Mexican descent, deal with each other daily in ways that are rapidly changing, moving the border from the periphery toward the center of U.S.-Mexican relations.

The most drastic changes have been brought about by the Mexican economic crisis and the sharp devaluation of the peso in 1982. Strict import controls and a continuously depreciating peso have cut the number of Mexican shoppers in U.S. border cities to a trickle. Downtowns remain boarded up in such dusty border towns as Calexico, California and Laredo, Texas, which depended on Mexican customers for their economic survival. Unemployment levels are tragically high, and there is a pervasive sense of despair. Larger U.S. border cities, unwilling to wait for the return of Mexican business, have begun to seek closer integration with the mainstream American economy.

The economic crisis has also sharply lowered real wages in Mexico and increased the attractiveness to U.S. firms of locating their assembly plants on the border, from which they can re-export finished products to the U.S. There are nearly five hundred such plants at present and over 150,000 low-wage Mexican workers—predominantly young women, although more men are also seeking these jobs. The result on both banks of the muddy Rio Grande is the disintegration of four centuries of economic interdependence.

Faced with a \$90 billion external debt, authorities in Mexico City are determined that the border cities must earn a dollar surplus. At the same time U.S. border cities, faced with the lowest per capita incomes in the U.S. (though they are two to three times higher than those across the river), undergo painful economic adjustments. Their pleas for special help from Washington have gone largely unheeded.

The Mexican economic crisis and the unravelling of border interdependence have also contributed to an increase of illegal Mexican migrants. Since the 1982 devaluation and the sharp drop in employment and incomes in Mexico, the

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Border Patrol has been apprehending over one million persons a year. Another 100,000 persons live in Mexico and, legally or illegally, work in the U.S. whether as maids, day laborers, or skilled workers. A handful of Americans, mostly medical students, live in the U.S. and study and work in Mexico.

The proposed Simpson-Mazzoli immigration legislation is a subject of intense controversy along the border but probably of limited impact. The understaffed and underfunded U.S. Border Patrol expects an additional \$35.6 million a year and 850 new agents, not enough to make an appreciable dent in the number of successful border-crossers. Any enforcement of sanctions on employers of illegal migrants would play havoc with border cities and towns, especially the service sectors. However, the Border Patrol has neither the resources nor the intention to look for illegal maids in the wealthier sections of San Diego and El Paso.

Border demographics is actually more worrisome than border-crossers. Due to natural fertility and rural-urban migration, Mexican border cities are growing by 3 per cent or more a year with both Juarez and Tijuana swelling to close to the one million mark. Prosperous by Mexican standards, these cities are unable to cope with demands for water, sewage, and other basic services. U.S. border cities are growing at about 1 per cent a year. Natural fertility is augmented by retirees attracted to the Sunbelt and by Mexican families reuniting. The end-of-the-century prospect is for four border Mexicans to every border American. The present ratio is two to one.

The changing demographics are reflected in the demand for services. Mexican border schools run on two and three daily shifts, and streets are thronged with children. The vigorous promotion of family planning is reducing fertility, but the demand for education is way ahead of capacity. The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision mandating free education for the children of illegal migrants has had an expensive impact on already poor school districts. An estimated 29,000 illegal Mexican children are attending Texas schools alone, many on the border; and requests for federal compensatory aid run close to \$90 million. The economic crisis and the population explosion have been accompanied by major political changes on both sides of the border. On the U.S. side Mexican-Americans are politically coming of age, carrying out voter registration drives coordinated by the San Antonio based Southwest Voter Registration League, and using the courts to challenge established political forces. Various combinations of voter registration, higher turnouts in traditionally low-voting communities, and lawsuits insisting on single-member districts rather than at-large voting have all paid off. Mexican-Americans currently control city councils, school boards, and other elected offices in each of the seventeen border cities except San Diego, where they are only 30 per cent of the population, and El Paso, where the fight for control continues.

Remarkably, on the Mexican side of the border there are increasingly effective challenges to the PRI government party, which has dominated Mexican politics for more than fifty years. Taking advantage of widespread discontent over the economic crisis, charges of local and national corruption, and local election machinery that works, opposition mayors and city councils have been elected in Juarez, Matamoros, and other border cities, and the PRI is in trouble everywhere. This opposition often consists of right-wing businessmen

precariously combining with urban squatters and radical students. They chase out the rascals and then feud among themselves.

The emergence of new political elites on either side of the border is generating a curious cultural dialogue. The Mexican-American elites have a sentimental attachment to the Spanish language and Mexico and a determination to make local, state, and federal government work for them. The hard-headed new political elites of the border Mexicans have a business attachment to the U.S., to English, and to American ways. They know, moreover, that in highly centralized Mexico, when a city hall is captured by the opposition, assistance from the state capital and from Mexico City is cut off—which reinforces their attachment to the U.S.

Underlying the economic, demographic, and political changes are the new problems of managing a rapidly growing urbanized border. An earlier generation of American and Mexican politicians and administrators worked together to produce the major achievement of shared flood control and hydroelectric schemes on the Rio Grande, which represents 1400 miles of the 1900 mile border. The work of the U.S.-Mexico International Boundary and Waters Commission is exemplified in the Amistad and Falcon dams built in the 1950s, and in the important role that they have played in providing irrigation, power, flood control, and recreation to both countries.

The new problems are those of twin cities—separated by an international boundary—that produce air pollution, massive amounts of sewage, and toxic wastes (like the radioactive cobalt left in a Juarez junkyard) while they deplete already dwindling underground water supplies. The multiple layers of ponderous bureaucracy in Washington and Mexico City, and the smaller but still ponderous bureaucracies in the Mexican and U.S. state capitals, have shown little aptitude or inclination to work on these problems. City officials are often stymied due to lack of funds or, in the cases of air pollution and toxic wastes, lack of authority. Informal cooperation continues between border elites, but it can do little, in spite of massive daily traffic jams, to shorten the fifteen or more years needed to get Mexico City and Washington to agree on a new international bridge. San Diego authorities have been searching for ways to prevent Tijuana's overflow sewage from choking its system. El Paso's ability to curb its worsening smog problem is thwarted by the low priority given to air pollution in Juarez and Mexico.

Failure to manage jointly the growing urban problems of the border is much more of a threat to U.S.-Mexican relations than any U.S. immigration legislation. Illegal migrants will continue to wade the shallow Rio Grande and head north, with or without the passage of Simpson-Mazzoli. Those who remain, the American and Mexican border residents, will have to upgrade their abilities to cooperate or else risk being swamped by jointly created problems that do not lend themselves to single-city or single-country solutions.

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