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David Ronfeldt

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The RAND Corporation, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406 2138

WHITHER ELITE COHESION IN MEXICO: A COMMENT

David Ronfeldt

For decades, Mexico has had a phenomenally cohesive ruling elite known as the "revolutionary family". Its outstanding feature used to be its ability to encompass a wide range of personalities, interests, sectors, and ideological tendencies. The diversity of the family's membership sometimes gave way to serious infighting, but a broadly shared commitment to principles of balance, equilibrium, and mutual accommodation generally worked to preserve elite cohesion. The durability of the family was even thought to involve a "pendulum" whereby different political "wings" would take turns alternating in power across presidential terms. In its classic period during the 1940s-1960s, the family was renowned for its most prominent wings, the Cardenista and Alemanista wings--the former being more identified with left of center, statist, centralist, populist, and nationalist positions, the latter more with right of center, conservative, federalist, and pro-private sector positions.¹

The result was a uniquely Mexican system that could occupy and control all relevant political space. To use a common spatial metaphor, the system was pyramidal. It was highly centralized. But it was also broad-based; it cut across diverse regions, classes, sectors,

This is a revised version of the talk I presented at the research workshop on "Mexico's Alternative Political Futures" at The Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, March 23-25, 1988. Completed in November 1988, prior to the inauguration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the paper was prepared for inclusion in Wayne Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter Smith (eds.), *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, Monograph Series, #30, Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California at San Diego, La Jolla, 1989, forthcoming. Some of my comments draw heavily on sections in Ronfeldt, "Questions and Cautions about Mexico's Future," in Susan Kaufman Purcell (ed.), *Mexico in Transition*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, New York, 1988, pp. 53-66.

¹ The wings were named after former Presidents Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) and Miguel Alemán (1946-52).

institutions, and ideologies. Both the centralizing and the cross-cutting capabilities of the system were important for elite cohesion.

The system not only dominated political space; it coopted all relevant dimensions of political time. Individuals of leftist as well as rightist aspirations could easily coexist within the revolutionary family--not just because the system rewarded them for doing so, but more to the point, because each could persist in believing, regardless of circumstances at any given moment, that the long-range future of the system was wide open and could ultimately evolve in accord with his preferences, be those of the left or the right. So long as all future options seemed open, the system could retain the allegiance of all sorts of elites.

The term "revolutionary family" is still used to refer to Mexico's political elite. But so many changes have occurred that this family no longer exists in its classic form. The political elite is in the throes of a dramatic transformation. Elite cohesion, far from being assured, has become a major uncertainty.

Against this background, this paper comments on some trends in the political elite and connections between elite change and institutional change in Mexico. The focus is on the problem of elite cohesion, including the mechanisms--especially the *camarilla* system--whereby balance and equilibrium, control and cooptation, get played out. A few speculations are offered about the future, and a few issues are mentioned that may prove particularly cohesive or divisive during the next administration in Mexico. The discussion is organized in terms of three levels of analysis:

- Changes at the individual level, where research has found significant shifts in the background and recruitment profiles of new entrants into the elite.
- Changes at the group level, where individuals organize into *camarillas* and *equipos* around key leaders--an obscure area for research and speculation.

- Changes at the overall "family" level where the complexion and cohesion of the elite may be analyzed in terms of political "wings" and "tendencies" and "currents".

CHANGES AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: BACKGROUND AND RECRUITMENT

As research by Roderic Camp, Peter Smith, and others has shown, major shifts have occurred in the background and recruitment of the political elite since the late 1960s.² To note some well-documented points, Mexico has gone: from an elite dominated by older *politicos* (politicians), to one dominated by youthful *tecnicos* (technocrats); from an elite where service in the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was required for ascendance, to an elite whose leaders have risen instead through service in the government's administrative apparatus; from an elite that included regional representatives, to an elite recruited mostly from Mexico City; from an elite that was multi-class in origins, to one increasingly recruited from the well-educated middle and upper classes; from an elite that included a broad spectrum of representatives from both the private and the public sector, to an elite marked by a breach between the two sectors.

These shifts began to take hold in the early 1970s under President Luis Echeverria (1970-76), and they are now in full bloom. At first, the shifts appeared to bring many new names into elite circles. By now, however, many rising stars of the 1980s are found to be the children (or relatives) of leaders prominent during earlier administrations.³

One result from these shifts in the profiles of individuals entering the political elite is that a dramatic generational change is occurring; a new political class is emerging. A new generation of elites--many of them quite young, highly educated, very nationalistic, often left of center and statist in their preferences if not their behavior--has gained a strong presence in the central government, and

² See works by Roderic Camp and Peter Smith cited in footnote 5.

³ Numerous examples are identified in Oscar Hinojosa, "La clase gobernante se nutre de sus propios cachorros." *Proceso*, No. 494, April 21, 1986, pp. 6-11.

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may now seek influence over the PRI, the Congress, and some state governments as the next targets.

Another result is an increasing "homogenization"--to use Rod Camp's term--in the background and recruitment profiles of recent entrants into the political elite. Perhaps this should prove positive for elite cohesion, at least among the new elements. But it has meant a narrowing of the new elite, which does not cut across class, regional, sectoral, and other lines the way the classic revolutionary family did. This has set the stage for tensions within the elite, and there lies a third prominent result: the rising tensions between the older generation of *políticos* and the newer generation of *técnicos*--tensions that have become basic to current explanations of the increasing lack of cohesion within the elite.⁴

In sum, important changes have occurred in the profiles of the individuals entering and comprising the elite, and useful implications may be drawn about the evolution of the elite as a whole. But there are limits to what can be done with this kind of data on individuals.

As research analysts we must be careful about treating individual changes as though they can be added up to represent aggregate changes,

⁴ While the research on shifts in individual backgrounds has greatly improved our knowledge of trends within the Mexican elite, studies of elites in other countries suggest that it would also be useful to have better data on additional attributes at the individual level, including patterns of elite circulation. A couple of questions come to mind about the occupation of positions within the government, the party, and related organizations. First, wasn't there an increase in the number (and quality) of offices and other positions available to the elite--both *políticos* and *técnicos*--during the boom years of the 1960s-1970s, and wasn't this followed by a rapid decrease in the crisis years of the 1970s-1980s? Second, haven't officials--both *políticos* and *técnicos*--been turning over, cycling up and out, faster than ever before, with diminished assurance of continuity across administrations? If so, this may further help explain the existence of tensions detrimental to elite cohesion. Such patterns of elite circulation would resemble the classic curve about rapidly rising then rapidly declining expectations that often accompanies major discontent. Some data and speculations about the effects of the rapid expansion of state enterprises and decentralized government agencies in the early 1970s appear in Samuel Schmidt, *El Deterioro del Presidencialismo Mexicano: Los Años de Luis Echeverría*, EDAMEX (Editores Asociados Mexicanos, S.A.), Mexico City, 1986, pp. 80-84.

and then treating those aggregates as though they represent actors in the political system. Haven't we been doing this to some extent with the distinction between *políticos* and *técnicos*--talking about them as though they were aggregate actors? But they aren't. There are all kinds of *políticos* and *técnicos*. They are not easily separated in practice. Some *políticos* may be closer to some *técnicos* than to other *políticos*; and the same applies to *técnicos*. And aspirants to top leadership positions need both *políticos* and *técnicos* in their teams.

How can we better understand this? To our growing knowledge of the profiles of individuals in Mexico's elite, we need to add another kind of knowledge about the formation and behavior of political groups like the *camarilla* and the *equipo*.

CHANGES IN GROUP FORMATION AND INTERACTION: CAMARILLAS AND EQUIPOS

Analysts may often talk as though the Mexican political system is well organized into formal structures, like the Ministry of Interior, the PRI, and the labor sector. We may then talk as though political consensus and conflict occur in terms of such formal structures. Yet we know full well that what happens in Mexican politics often depends on underlying, informal, fluid interactions among the elite. It is easy to overlook this because it is difficult to do research in this area and know more than incidental anecdotes and gossip. Yet any effort to analyze the evolution of the elite and the prospects for continued cohesion must attend to the formation and interaction of informal groups like *camarillas* and *equipos*.

The Camarilla System

In a word, *camarillas* may be defined as cliques.⁵ They typically consist of a key leader and the individuals who get grouped around that

⁵ The publications I scanned to compose this brief statement include: Roderic A. Camp, *Mexico's Leaders: Their Education and Recruitment*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona, 1980; the five-part series by and beginning with Camp, "Las elites mexicanas," *Vuelta*, No. 138, May 1988, pp. 35-38; the articles by Camp, John Bailey, Daniel Levy, and Peter Smith in Camp (ed.), *Mexico's Political Stability: The Next Five Years*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1986; Wayne A. Cornelius and Ann L. Craig, *Politics in Mexico: An Introduction and Overview*, Reprint Series 1, Revised Edition, Center for

leader, usually with the objective of getting the leader and other members of the *camarilla* into higher positions of influence. The formation and cohesion of the group depend on personal ties and loyalties, as well as on mutual interests in acquiring and exercising political power and enhancing career mobility. The cohesion and effectiveness of the group also depend on the ability of the members to provide information and access that is useful to the group and its leader(s), and on the ability of the leader to provide rewards to the other members as he gains higher positions.

The group may have an ideological complexion. But ideology is not what holds it together, and too clear a definition may not be to the group's advantage. The group may also be identified with a particular institution. But again, institutional connections are not what hold such a group together, and too strong an institutional identification may not be to its advantage. The literature on Mexico is not as clear on this point as it should be--one reason for introducing the discussion about Iran in the next section. The more diverse the membership--that

U.S.-Mexican Studies University of California, San Diego, California, 1988; Richard R. Fagen and William S. Tuohy, *Politics and Privilege in a Mexican City*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1972; Merilee S. Grindle, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study in Public Policy*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1977; Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View*, Revised Edition, Praeger Special Studies, New York, New York, 1978; Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change*, Second Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987; L. Vincent Padgett, *The Mexican Political System*, Second Edition, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Massachusetts, 1966; Susan Kaufman Purcell and John F. H. Purcell, "State and Society in Mexico: Must a Stable Polity Be Institutionalized?," *World Politics*, January 1980, pp. 194-227; Peter F. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1979. However, while such literature on Mexican politics often points out the importance of the *camarilla* system, I have not located any extended analyses. In addition, interesting material on the evolution of the Mexican elite at the national level appears in Luis González, *La Ronda de las Generaciones: Los Protagonistas de la Reforma y la Revolución Mexicana*, Secretaría de Educación Pública, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, Mexico City, Mexico, 1984; and at the local level, in Gustavo del Castillo V., *Crisis y transformación de una sociedad tradicional*, Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del INAH, Ediciones de la Casa Chata, No. 10, Mexico City, Mexico, 1979.

is, the more it cuts across personal, institutional, sectoral, ideological, and other lines, and the more it links varied interests together--the better the prospects for a *camarilla*.

As leaders compete with other leaders for power and other rewards, so do *camarillas* compete with other *camarillas*. In the Mexican system, no leader can advance without building his own *grupito*, along with connections to other important *camarillas*. Thus they, and not the individual leaders per se, have been called the "most basic membership units of power." (Johnson) Accordingly, "Power struggles between various individuals within the official party are often conflicts between competing *camarillas*, rather than true ideological debates between the left and the right." (Camp)⁶

The *camarilla* system writ large resembles a vast web. An individual may belong (or at least have connections) to more than one *camarilla*. Each *camarilla* may seek links to other *camarillas*. Membership in any one *camarilla* may be fluid and shifting.⁷ The interconnections may thus result in "extended alliance networks" (Grindle) that suggest "wheels within wheels" (Padgett) or pyramids within pyramids (Camp).⁸

By comparison, the *equipo* is a somewhat different phenomenon. In a word, it means "team" and refers to those trusted, confidential persons, usually employees, who work as staff for a particular leader, usually a high-ranking office-holder who needs able advisers and aides. A high-ranking leader must have a good *equipo*, but members of the *equipo* may or may not belong to the leader's *camarilla*.

Camarillas and *equipos* are thus crucial mechanisms for building vertical and horizontal alliances in Mexico. They are "of fundamental

⁶ Quotes are from Johnson, p. 92, and Camp, 1980, p. 27.

⁷ "At all levels there is thus substantial tension between the need to be identified with and protected by a patron, and the need to maintain sufficient independence of action, identification, and other contacts to rescue oneself should the patron's career and influence begin to decline." (Fagen and Tuohy, pp. 25-26)

⁸ Quotes are from Grindle, p. 54, Padgett, p. 69, and Camp, 1980, p. 19.

importance in ensuring and maintaining elite cohesion in Mexico." (Grindle) Functioning properly, they embody the principles of accommodation and equilibrium that have long held the political system together.⁹ Policymaking processes within the government and the PRI, the ability of one leader to influence another, and ultimately Mexico's political stability, may depend more on the workings of these informal elite structures than on the formal institutions per se.¹⁰ In sum, it has been said that

"The formal structure operates, or breaks down, according to the functioning of the political cliques that lie at the heart of Mexico's esoteric democracy." (Johnson)

"Whenever the chains [of patron-client relations and *camarillas*] have failed to meet at the top of the pyramid, open factionalism disrupts the regime, and the incumbent president must struggle to consolidate his dominance over all members of the 'revolutionary family'." (Cornelius and Craig)¹¹

Similarity to the Dowreh System in Iran

Mexico is not the only country where elite politics revolve around informal groups that take shape around around key individuals and connect together into vast web-like networks. Elsewhere in Latin America, Colombia and Brazil reportedly have informal, group-based systems similar to Mexico's. However, the system to which I will call attention lies farther afield. The literature on the *dowreh* (or *dawrah*) system in Iran in the early 1970s often sounds like it could be

⁹ "Since the early 1940s, the struggle between *camarillas* has found resolution through accommodation and equilibrium, not elimination or annihilation of contending factions." (Smith, p. 51)

¹⁰ "Formal government is...often dependent on the informal Great Pyramid for policy-making, while the Great Pyramid is usually dependent on the formal hierarchies for policy implementation." (Padgett, p. 185) "The system is held together not by institutions, but by the rigid discipline of the elites in not overstepping the bounds of the bargain." (Purcell and Purcell, p. 195)

¹¹ Quotes are from Grindle, p. 69, Johnson, p. 82, and Cornelius and Craig, p. 22.

describing Mexico's *camarilla* system. Moreover, that literature makes points about the *dowreh* system that seem useful for better understanding the *camarilla* system.¹²

In a word, *dowreh* means clique--more literally, circle, ring, or cycle--and refers to a "small group of people...who organize about some common purpose and meet on a regular basis." (Zonis) *Dowrehs* are designed to build and reinforce personal ties. In politics, their purpose is to further the members' careers in a system where traditions are strong, channels to power are personal and informal, institutions are weak, and overt political activity is impossible or risky.¹³

The *dowreh* system helps advance and protect personal interests by plugging individuals (and their groups) into diverse communications channels and information networks--the more the better. Ideally, an individual should hold several positions and jobs at the same time. He should then belong to, or be in contact with, several *dowrehs* at the same time. For its part, a *dowreh* should have a member located in each key ministry or other sector, encompass all shades of opinion, and be represented in all camps. Important families should act like *dowrehs*. In this way, the *dowreh* can help its members to move up if a break comes, to survive if things change to their detriment.

¹² My reason for introducing this comparison to Iran is not motivated by an expectation that Mexico may end up like Iran. The comparison arises from the fact I was impressed by the literature on the *dowreh* system in the mid 1970s--a time when I worked briefly on U.S.-Iranian relations, and elite studies on Iran seemed more advanced than those on Mexico. This is simply the first conference that has afforded me the opportunity to call attention to the comparison. My sources on the *dowreh* system are limited to the few I read in the mid 1970s: James A. Bill, *The Politics of Iran: Groups, Classes, and Modernization*, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1972; Bill, "The Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran," *The Middle East Journal*, Spring 1973, pp. 131-151; and Marvin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1971. I have not been able to review more recent analyses on Iran for the sake of this article. But it is my understanding that these early sources remain fairly reliable for my limited descriptive purposes.

¹³ Quote is from Zonis, p. 238.

To Western eyes, *dowrehs* may seem composed of strange, unlikely, and even contradictory assortments of individuals: perhaps old-style politicians as well as young technocrats, merchants as well as bureaucrats, leftists as well as rightists, and individuals from disparate regions and classes. But that is precisely a strength in this highly personalistic system. The deliberate diversity of membership helps position the *dowreh* and its members to collect information from all directions and take advantage of contacts and opportunities wherever they may arise. It is natural in Iran for an individual to cultivate multiple loyalties and keep shifting position, and for *dowrehs* to be elastic and constantly in flux. Indeed, there may be no clear distinction, for either individuals or *dowrehs*, between who are the moderates and pragmatists, and who are the radicals and ideologues-- a *dowreh* may need both, and an individual may shift from one stance to the other depending on the circumstances.

Personalism may be the most important cultural or psychological factor that explains the tenacity of the traditional *dowreh* system-- but it is not the only such factor. Bill and Zoris found that the system results from, and compensates for, the constant climate of tension, insecurity, uncertainty, cynicism, distrust, dissimulation, intrigue, exploitation, and avoidance of responsibility in which the elites work. The sense of uncertainty and insecurity was most evident among the younger generation of elites in the early 1970s, with the alienation from traditional personalistic politics being most evident among new technocrats (who would compensate by looking outside the system--abroad--for support and allies).

The *dowreh* system, difficult as it may be for Americans to understand, is inherently designed to provide balance and equilibrium and facilitate control and cooptation among competing elites. When working properly, it serves to distribute power--it inhibits excessive concentration and splinters heavy opposition. By keeping politics hidden, it serves to avoid open conflict and confrontation. And because no demands are ever totally rejected or refused, it promises that individuals or groups may eventually have a new opportunity to recover, advance, and circulate.

A Few Implications of the Comparison

To be sure, Mexico is not Iran; any similarity of their elite systems does not necessarily imply an Iranian-like future for Mexico. There are big differences between the two countries. For example, traditional cultural and religious forces are stronger in Iran, whereas formal institutions and political parties are stronger in Mexico. Personalism--a key factor behind both the *dowreh* and the *camarilla* systems--takes different forms in each country; patron-client attachments are more important and durable in Mexico. The two countries' political cultures reflect differences in their Islamic and Catholic backgrounds.

Despite such differences, the comparison is instructive. The trends in the composition and conduct of the Iranian elite as of the early 1970s--e.g., the increasing urbanization of elite recruitment, and the decline of regional ties; the rise of technocrats who believed in their plans, resisted traditional policymaking practices, and ended up frustrated and alienated; the generational and other tensions between technocrats and old-style politicians; the growing arrogance and isolation of the Shah's monarchy, and its loss of contact with conditions in provincial areas--all may now be read as warning indicators of the collapse and revolution to come. Such narrowing, fragmentation, and isolation have not progressed to the same degree in Mexico, but the parallels are striking and should heighten concern about the mix of trends there.

The similarity of the Mexican to the Iranian elite system also helps call attention to some interactions between elite change and institutional change. Traditional systems like the *camarilla* and the *dowreh* appear to work best when formal political institutions are relatively weak and far from modern. Institutional modernization, by compartmentalizing elites and requiring them to define themselves more precisely, can interfere with the fluidity and flexibility required by the traditional elite systems. Where modernization is occurring and formal institutions are gaining strength, then such elite systems seem best suited to corporatism as a way to build a broad-based (and

purportedly democratic) but nonetheless highly centralized (and therefore authoritarian) system. If the formal structures of power weaken drastically, then power struggles, policy outcomes, and political stability may depend largely on who can make best use of the traditional informal mechanisms of elite interaction until institutional power is restored. But if at the same time the traditional mechanisms of elite interaction and cohesion have lost their flexibility and vitality, and/or if extreme fragmentation and polarization have taken hold, then it will be very difficult to restore the established institutions as the decisive actors.

The similarities between the *dowreh* and *camarilla* systems show that elite cohesion may depend on the ability of leaders to form highly diversified alliances that may seem contradictory and incompatible at first sight, but where the contradictions are really quite compatible and to mutual advantage. The analyses of the *dowreh* system illuminate that where personal loyalties can be counted on, such alliances enhance a group's prospects by plugging it into a broad range of communication networks, information sources, and rival decision centers. As noted earlier, Mexico's classic revolutionary family, and the *camarillas* comprising it, long embodied such alliances. The family had strong centralizing and cross-cutting abilities that enabled it to occupy all relevant political space. And it could incorporate elites who had different ideological (i.e., time) orientations, partly because of widespread beliefs that the future possibilities and policy options of the system remained open regardless of present circumstances.

This is not the case with today's elite in Mexico. The principles that guided the classic *camarilla* (and *dowreh*) system do not appear to be working very well anymore. However this should be explained--whether it owes to shifts within the elite or broader forces of social change--the centralizing tendencies within the elite and the key institutions have become excessive, and some groups comprising and competing within the elite seem to have lost the ability and the interest to cut across diverse personal, ideological, sectoral, and other lines. In addition, a sense seems to have spread, both in ideological and personal terms, that the system's long-range future options are not so open anymore.

Members of the elite have begun operating according to much narrower spatial and temporal horizons.

Instructive as these comparative comments may be, what is really needed to assess the prospects for elite cohesion in Mexico is empirical research profiling the current state of the *camarilla* system in Mexico. We know (or think we know) that the system is in tremendous flux right now because of the breaches and rivalries that have erupted in connection with the presidential nomination, election, and succession process. But research data is lacking--at least to my knowledge--to depict the current *camarilla* system and assess its workings and possible future implications.

Nonetheless, one comment seems worth making. President-elect Carlos Salinas de Gortari is reputed to be weak and unpopular in elite circles. Yet he looks in relatively good shape compared to his immediate predecessors, Presidents José Lopez Portillo (1976-82) and Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88). They were said to have small *equipos* and *camarillas*, mostly comprised of *técnicos* like themselves, at the time they won office.¹⁴ The *camarilla* Salinas has been forming over the years includes far more than *técnicos*. Its lineage reportedly stems in part from a broader, deeply rooted cluster of economists, bankers, and businessmen who may be partly identified with a key architect of economic thinking and planning in Mexico since the 1940s, Antonio Ortiz Mena. López Portillo and de la Madrid, as well as many other prominent *tecnicos*, have also been identified with the same lineage. But Salinas' *camarilla* also includes individuals with solid past connections to the two most important left-leaning, state-building architects of modern Mexico: President Lazaro Cárdenas himself (1934-40) and Jesús Reyes Heróles, who headed many important offices during the 1960s-80s.

¹⁴ Robert Newell G. and Luis Rubio F., *Mexico's Dilemma: The Political Origins of Economic Crisis*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1984, esp. pp. 76-77, indicate that prior to 1970 the heads of the revolutionary family normally were able to reach agreement on who should be the next president; hence the choice would enter the succession period with a strong coalition supporting him. However, beginning with 1970, lack of agreement within the family has resulted in the incumbent president deciding on his own who his successor will be; the choice has then had to use the succession period to develop his coalition.

Salinas also has good personal (and parental) connections to some old-guard PRI figures and to key business leaders, particularly in the Monterrey area. In other words, his *equipo* and *camarilla* have more breadth and depth than was the case with his predecessors, and he appears to have built his connections in keeping with the classic principles. Granted, his nomination and election have aroused far more disfavor, including inside elite circles, than was the case with his predecessors. But what little is known about his *camarilla* suggests that his weakness and vulnerability have been exaggerated. Once in office, he may well turn out to be stronger than many analysts have been expecting.

CHANGES AT THE OVERALL FAMILY LEVEL

At this level, the key leaders and their *camarillas* and *equipos* integrate into the ruling elite--the "revolutionary family" or "political class"--as a whole. During the 1950s-60s, the family was described as having three vertical levels: a top level consisting of the president and his inner council, a second level consisting of important interest-group leaders, and a third level corresponding to the government bureaucracy and related organizations.¹⁵ Horizontally, the family was said to have strong, well-defined wings, notably the Cardenista and Alemanista wings. Members of the family generally displayed great loyalty and discipline toward the system as a whole, and especially its apex, the president, and its key institution, the PRI.

All this looks different today. There is still a lingering sense of "family", newly reinforced by the growing presence of young entrants who are the children of leaders past. But the family cannot be described structurally the way it used to be. The president still stands at the apex; but the power of the presidency and the PRI is less certain. The state's administrative leaders seem to have surpassed the

¹⁵ From the classic description by Frank Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964. The recent analysis by Newell and Rubio offers a useful distinction between the "Inner Family" and the "Outer Family".

outside interest-group leaders in policymaking influence; that is, the second and third levels in Brandenburg's description have traded places. And Congress, which barely deserved a mention in past discussions, is becoming an important factor. In addition, many members of the elite now show little commitment to the PRI; some are not even members of the party. Breaches between government and private sector elites have been serious enough since the 1970s to require the periodic negotiation (and renegotiation) of special pacts to keep everybody working together peaceably. The recent emergence of the Democratic Current and the presidential campaign of Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas have opened up new breaches in other parts of the elite. There are no longer "wings" defined around historic leaders, but looser "currents" and "tendencies".¹⁶

Elite cohesion is at stake in all these points, but I will focus my comments on the last point. Phenomena like wings, currents, and tendencies may be identified with particular leaders or sets of leaders; but they serve more than personal functions. They represent basic stances within the elite regarding what kind of a system Mexico should have and how it should be developed as a nation. They embody the legacies of the past and the visions of the future that different sectors of the elite have a stake in, and that they are willing to struggle over.

As I have argued before,¹⁷ the elite family is going through a seachange. The old generation, which looked to the unifying experiences of the 1910 revolution, is being succeeded by a new generation that is

¹⁶ Newell and Rubio warn (p. 268) that "as the society has become more complex and as the Family has come to represent an ever-smaller part of the civil society, the Family too has tended to react rather than act purposefully in the pursuit of its privileges. If maintained for too long, this behavior could trigger another round of instability." Rubio, "Hacia un nuevo pacto social," *Nexos*, No. 122, February 1988, pp. 43-47, provides a cogent analysis of the current disarray and dissensus within the elite.

¹⁷ In Ronfeldt, "Questions and Cautions about Mexico's Future," in Susan Kaufman Purcell (ed.), *Mexico in Transition*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, New York, 1988, pp. 53-66; and earlier in Ronfeldt, *The Modern Mexican Military: Implications for Mexico's Stability and Security*, N-2288-FF/RC, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, February 1985.

marked by the divisive experiences of the 1968 student-led rebellion. So far, this new generation appears to have a relatively narrow base, both as to recruitment and orientation. Many members tend to be left of center, statist, and nationalist in orientation if not behavior, in keeping with important Mexican traditions. There is a substantial, older conservative wing to the political elite; and some individual right-of-center leaders may be more powerful than the leftist-nationalist ones. But the philosophical and political redefinition of the elite family since the 1970s has been driven mainly by the newer, more left-of-center elements. This has been evident, for example, in public policy debates over the terms of the "national project" during the past ten years.

Compared to the old revolutionary family, then, and beginning with the trends that took hold during the Echeverría administration, the emerging family has developed strong "post-Cardenista" tendencies but lacked strong "post-Alemanista" tendencies. This would appear to represent an imbalance for a system where policy consensus, elite cohesion, and political stability have long depended on adhering over time to the principles of balance and equilibrium inherent in the original concept of the revolutionary family. If the new family is to develop as a truly well-integrated, broad-based elite family, in keeping with Mexico's pragmatic, time-tested principles of balance and equilibrium, it will have to not only continue maturing its post-Cardenista tendencies, but also begin nurturing well-defined post-Alemanista tendencies, and seek to bridge the two.

President Miguel de la Madrid, who has acted like a relative centrist and transitional leader but cannot be easily labeled, has endeavored to correct the imbalance. His hard-pressed administration has instituted economic policies and reforms--a combination of liberalization and austerity--that are reportedly working to remake the private sector and restore good government-business relations. But this has been occurring very slowly. Meanwhile, elements of the elite who identified with Cardenista ideals were shunted aside and became alienated. Their combative resurgence in the last two years--the Democratic Current and the presidential campaign of Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas

being the most prominent manifestations--has confirmed, much to the surprise of many in Mexico, that post-Cardenista tendencies remain strong within the elite and among the public at large.

The restoration of balance and equilibrium according to classic Mexican principles may still require policies from the next president to complete what de la Madrid set out to do: restructure and liberalize the economy, remake the private sector, and bring its leaders confidently and securely back into the family fold. This may also require drawing into government and PRI posts new middle-level leaders and *equipos* who will truly support such policies. If de la Madrid's successor could succeed with this while somehow reducing the animosity between statist and private-sector elites, he could help broaden the new elite family. But if the next president returns to relatively leftist, nationalist, statist policies, then the post-Cardenista constituents of the new elite may get to consolidate an exclusive, narrow hold on the system. In that presumably unlikely event, elite cohesion and institutional stability would have to be discussed in terms far different from those I have emphasized in this comment.

It is too soon to tell in what directions Salinas will take his administration. Material may be found in his background and *camarilla* to suggest that he could go in either a post-Alemanista or a post-Cardenista direction, or in both directions at the same time.¹⁸ Most observers expect he will continue on the economic course set under de la Madrid. Assuming this occurs and that economic growth and private sector confidence are indeed restored, it should broaden the bases for elite cohesion and help correct the imbalance discussed above. It is doubtful, however, that Salinas will want to leave office labeled as a new type of conservative or rightist who principally benefited private enterprise. His hopes and goals seem much broader and more complex than that. Moreover, once economic recovery is underway, it should be easier to focus on the political and social reforms on his agenda.

¹⁸ The usual way is to lean to the right on domestic economic policy, and to the left on foreign policy.

Thus one scenario to consider is that the Salinas regime will start out emphasizing what are regarded as right-of-center policies, especially in economic areas. But once these succeed, presumably no later than mid term, his regime will turn to emphasize what will be regarded as left-of-center or post-Cardenista policies, especially in social and political areas. If all were to go well in this fragile scenario, Salinas, and by extension de la Madrid and Salinas together, would achieve a modernizing renewal of the elite family. Confidence and cohesion would be restored both to the right and the left of a strong center. Salinas could leave office acclaimed as a Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Mikhail Gorbachev, or a European-style social democrat *a la Mexicana*.¹⁹

Much more is involved in this delicate scenario than just restoring or coopting members of the elite who were alienated. The heart of the matter is redefining the key tendencies within the elite, in accord with modernized visions of the future across the political spectrum. Some elites in both private and public circles--perhaps businessmen who were protected by earlier economic schemes, and politicians who are identified with traditional forms of populism, statism, and nationalism--have been operating according to old visions of the future. These remain significant tendencies in Mexico, but they are tendencies attuned to the Mexico of a few decades ago.

Mexico has changed substantially this decade in connection with the policies the de la Madrid administration set in motion to liberalize and decentralize the economy. It may even turn out that a structural revolution has been put in place without much notice. As a result--to hark back to earlier points--old visions are being invalidated, and options for the future that seemed possible in the 1960s and 1970s are being closed across the political spectrum. This seems especially painful for some old-guard leaders--dare I say reactionaries and emissaries of the past--on both the right and the left. Yet, even as

¹⁹ William Schneider of the *Los Angeles Times* has suggested that Salinas may belong to, and help define, a "post-ideological left"--a very interesting, albeit unclear term.

modernizing change may close some policy options, it may open up others for new elites to identify with and focus on--for example, in the areas of regional development, multiparty competition, and participation in the international economy.

Salinas and his team are trying to enter office as the harbingers and constructors of a new vision of Mexico's future. By successfully consolidating and continuing the structural revolution begun under de la Madrid, they (not to mention others) will have the opportunity to help determine what modernized visions and options for the future are going to emerge and take hold in Mexico across the political spectrum. A period of profound intellectual ferment lies ahead, if it has not already begun. A key challenge for the new administration will be to find and foster new entrants to the elite who, while respecting traditional tendencies within the elite, will be attuned to the structural changes that have occurred and can help deepen them without dividing Mexico.