

## MEXICO-U.S. SECURITY: A PRIORITY FOR THE BILATERAL AGENDA

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In recent years security has become a fundamental topic in relations between Mexico and the United States. For both countries, it occupies a vital place on their own domestic agendas, and on the bilateral agenda as well. Due to geographic determinism and a circle of common economic interests—and despite political variations in the state of affairs at any given moment and notwithstanding some wounded sensibilities—they share a common problem unparalleled in history.

Beyond some confusion and what appeared in the media, Mexico's position following the September 2001 terrorist attacks was one of full support. It is true that there was some wavering on the part of some members of the cabinet in the days after the attacks, and a certain mean-spiritedness on the part of some political parties. Equally true is that these blunders have been well-documented in a kind of combination “book-reproach” written by Jeffrey Davidow when he was U.S. ambassador in Mexico. From the very first pages, his annoyance at Mexico's lack of consideration is evident:

The initial reaction by the Mexican people and government was, as expected, one of horror.... However, the reaction rapidly became confused, and degenerated into an unseemly political debate that revealed a great deal of imprudence and insensitivity.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond this clumsy reaction, Mexico carried out all the necessary changes in its security strategy and risks agenda to cooperate in a resolute, visible way to improve security levels.

However, Washington's reaction to Mexico and other countries has not contributed much to creating a better atmosphere. The premonitions expressed by many observers after hearing President Bush's initial speeches after the attacks were not very encouraging and leaned toward the United States opting for a fundamentally unilateral, self-absorbed policy, and adopting a paradigm that, as Luis Ernesto Derbez has put it very well, consists of obtaining security “against everyone and despite everyone.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Davidow, *El oso y el puercoespín* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2003), 23-24; translated from Spanish by the author; available in English as *The Bear and the Porcupine*, published by Markus Wiener Publishers. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>2</sup> Luis Ernesto Derbez Bautista, “Una frontera en franca evolución,” *El Universal*, August 9, 2004.

This has had tangible consequences. Influential political analyst Fareed Zakaria attests to the increasing incomprehension in other countries of the way in which Washington has handled its foreign policy since 2001. In countries as disparate as France and Indonesia, anti-U.S. sentiment has increased to its highest levels in the last 50 years.<sup>3</sup> It is probably not that high in other countries, but there is growing mistrust, and this is not a spontaneous occurrence.

The initial security strategies designed by the Bush administration were developed as if its surroundings were totally hostile, fraught with danger and threats. Inspections and control of passengers and cargo containers were initiated without regard to the fact that the United States is flanked by two friendly countries, allies and trade partners, specifically Mexico and Canada.

It is important to emphasize here that there are two components in U.S. security strategy: at the bilateral level, which is the most important for the two countries, the issue is dominated by the guidelines of the National Strategy for Homeland Security,<sup>4</sup> and on a broader level, the controversial doctrine of preemptive action has gained ground.<sup>5</sup> For most of the world's countries, these two elements of U.S. strategy can be conceived of as one and the same. However, for Mexico, it is vital to distinguish between them, since the disagreements generated by U.S. international actions do not necessarily affect the crucial agreements for defending the North American security perimeter.<sup>6</sup>

Mexico has cooperated without fail in maintaining the North American security perimeter.<sup>7</sup> Meetings between the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security and Mexico's Interior Ministers have been frequent, and communication is guaranteed through special channels maintained between the two government officials. In addition, Mexico reinforced its border controls, especially in relation to the so-called restricted nationalities and has accepted and supported the concept of intelligent borders. Mexico has implemented all the controls imposed by U.S. authorities on its civil aviation, as if they were part of its own program. Operation Centinela was implemented in response to the war in Iraq, mobilizing security forces several thousand strong.<sup>8</sup> Another facet of this cooperation is the partici-

<sup>3</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "The world's most dangerous ideas," *Foreign Policy* (September-October 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Office of Homeland Security, "National Strategy for Homeland Security," July 2002, at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/book/nat\\_strat\\_hls.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/book/nat_strat_hls.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See "The National Security Strategy of the USA," September 2002, and especially Chapter V: "Prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies and our friends with WMD," at [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html).

<sup>6</sup> A description and justification of Bush security strategy can be found in Philip Zelikow, "The Transformation of National Security," *The National Interest*, no. 79 (spring 2003). An interesting criticism of aspects of Bush security doctrine can be found in Madeleine Albright, "La guerra equivocada," *Foreign Affairs en español*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>7</sup> See the critical perspective offered in regard to all these matters in Alejandro Dávila Flores, "Smart borders y seguridad nacional después del 11 de septiembre ¿tomando decisiones inteligentes?" in Cristina Rosas, comp., *Terrorismo, democracia y seguridad* (Mexico City: UNAM/Australian National University, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Press conference, Ministers of the Interior and Defense, March 18, 2003, at [www.gobernación.gob.mx](http://www.gobernación.gob.mx).

pation in exercises simulating a terrorist attack, such as those conducted in November 2003 along the Sonora-Arizona border. At the bilateral level, cooperation is fluid, with no strings attached. Since the 2005 Waco summit, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) has been the new trilateral framework for bolstering the security agenda and striking a balance with the prosperity agenda.

However, there have been important discrepancies in the multilateral context, especially in how to deal with Iraq. During Mexico's participation in the United Nations Security Council (2001-2003), it took positions supporting the inspections headed by Hans Blix,<sup>9</sup> and this autonomy led to some friction with the hegemonic power, without, however, placing bilateral cooperation in jeopardy—which is, in the end, the most important for Washington and for Mexico.<sup>10</sup> In addition to this, Mexico is clearly off the map in terms of the fundamentalisms that encourage terrorism. This comparative advantage has not, in our opinion, been adequately considered.

In short, the U.S. reaction—although initially understandable—offended a good number of its allies in numerous ways, and this is especially true in the case of a partner like Mexico, since it knocked Mexican affairs down to last place on its list of priorities.<sup>11</sup> Issues of great importance, such as the agenda for deepening bilateral relations between the two countries, and consolidating North America as a region, vanished from the scene in 2001. The so called “NAFTA Plus” has experienced practically the same fate,<sup>12</sup> although recently, more importance has been placed on economic issues, and a more serious focus has been given to the competitiveness of the North American region (United States, Canada and Mexico) through the SSP with respect to other regions of the world.

The long-aspired-to migration agreement for regularizing the situation for thousands of undocumented Mexicans working in the United States (proposed at the beginning of the Fox administration) was brushed aside, relegated to the lowest of U.S. priorities for nearly two years.

The issues that are fundamental for Mexico in a context dominated by the need to redefine its relations with its neighbor to the north in a more constructive and comprehensive way were literally placed on the back burner.

## The Forgotten Agenda and Its Consequences

The progress made in Mexico since the year 2000 in terms of democratization, respect for human rights, top-level cooperation in the fight against drug traffick-

<sup>9</sup> Hans Blix, *¿Desarmando a Irak?* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> This relative independence in handling multilateral issues is not new. A few months before NAFTA was signed, Mexico took a position in the United Nations condemning the invasion of Panama.

<sup>11</sup> See Jorge Castañeda, “La relación olvidada,” *Foreign Affairs en español*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2003). On a humorous note, the editor of *Foreign Affairs*, Moisés Naim, has said that from the perspective of the Bush administration, Latin America has become Atlantis, the lost continent.

<sup>12</sup> On December 12, 2003, President Vicente Fox Quesada was interviewed by *Business Week*, and explicitly addressed the idea of NAFTA Plus.

ing and the determination to deepen relations with the United States has not been matched with concrete proposals. This lack of response from Washington has implied political costs for Mexico's first non-Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) administration.

What is true is that not all of the above can be attributed to U.S. disinterest in Mexican affairs. The misunderstandings and mistakes made by the Fox administration in the way it handled the proposal for a migration agreement have damaged the Mexican government's credibility in the eyes of the public. Fox was mistaken in his initial proposal, when he assumed that a splendid personal relationship between the two presidents would be enough to provide the needed push for such an important instrument. Reality has demonstrated the contrary.

The "old" Mexican nationalists regrouped into the PRI and Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) attacked Fox for his "naïveté" in trusting the Bush administration, reaffirming their long-held positions and prejudices with regard to the United States. The notion of being considered the "back yard" of the world's foremost power has been reinforced in the perceptions of broad sectors of the population.

The consequences of this situation are clearly negative for Mexico. The traditional political class is reinforcing its anti-U.S. prejudices, which had gradually been disappearing in the previous years with the advancement of trade integration.

The alleged initial spirit of the two administrations for seeking greater understanding and cooperation remained nothing more than good intentions. A large number of U.S. opinion-makers in the mass media and a considerable number of decision makers have not been able to understand that friendly cooperation was crucial for recognizing Mexico as a real partner with whom it wishes to deepen relations. A gesture of friendship and trust from its neighbor to the north would have been useful for the Mexican government, with the aim of preventing cooperation from being interpreted by revolutionary nationalists as a sign of surrender, and also, for expanding that cooperation to other spheres. A fence along the common border as a way to deal with security and migration issues is not precisely a constructive agenda.

## **Integration Comes to a Halt**

By 2006, the development of North America as an economic region and trade area marked by internal coherence had not advanced beyond the levels characterizing the previous decade. The George W. Bush administration enjoyed boasting of its privileged relationship with Mexico. At the closing ceremony of the 2002 Monterrey summit, Bush said that between Mexico and the United States, there was "a historic partnership, one which will benefit both our peoples and provide a good example for the rest of the world."<sup>13</sup> How can such a statement be interpreted?

<sup>13</sup> George Bush, March 22, 2002, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020322-10.html>.

While other regions of the world, like Europe, have developed an emerging supra-national identity, while preserving their national particularities, North America has not moved beyond the free trade level,<sup>14</sup> and since 2001, the gap between Mexico and the United States has grown. Far from developing more trust between the two countries, our main successes can be described at two levels:

- 1) The first is that despite the obsession around security, we find that economic and human flows have been maintained, although hindered and marked by more mistrust.
- 2) The second is that we have cooperated in a satisfactory way, not in building bridges and liaisons for enhancing the prosperity of both countries, but in building borders, controls and even fences.

To the contrary, European countries have consistently worked together to deal with security issues. The group of countries in what is known as the Schengen area has suppressed internal border controls and created a European office for addressing terrorism-related matters. They are working at a more comprehensive level to develop a common security arrangement.<sup>15</sup> But let us return to North America.

At a tactical-operational level, we should point out that despite the errors in the way Mexico initially addressed the problem, and despite the nationalist reactions in the United States, the two countries have adapted practically to security arrangements for North America. Tom Ridge, the former Secretary of Homeland Security, put it this way in 2004:

Each of us has a homeland to protect. An attack on one affects the security and economy of the other... the mission of guaranteeing our liberties and protecting our citizens against terrorists and other offenders who harm and take advantage of innocent people. We share a clear vision of prosperity and security, of democracy and open markets. We understand exactly what is at stake. Mexico is a strong partner in the war against terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

We clearly share the same objectives. However, when it comes to the methods used for dealing with problems, the two countries' perceptions begin to diverge. For the U.S. government, everything is potentially a risk and therefore must be given priority attention. Once again, let us look at comments made by Tom Ridge:

Our historic confidence in the protection offered to us by two vast oceans and two good neighbors will no longer be adequate against an enemy that turns airplanes into

<sup>14</sup> Robert Pastor, "La segunda década de América del Norte," *Foreign Affairs en español*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>15</sup> Javier Solana, "Una Europa segura en un mundo mejor," document, European Council meeting, Thessaloniki, Greece, June 20, 2003, at <http://www.ue.eu.int/newroom>.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Ridge, "Dos patrias, una misión. Cómo la seguridad interna y la respuesta estadounidense al 11S han unido a México y Estados Unidos," *Foreign Affairs en español*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004).

missiles and cargo containers into transportation for weapons. The same communication and transportation systems used to expand prosperity throughout the world and lift people out of poverty are now used by terrorist networks to spread fear and harvest destruction.<sup>17</sup>

Within this logic of universalizing risk, the everyday lives of the economic actors who base their prosperity on free trade are directly affected. The long waits for trucks at the borders and all the necessary certification processes for entering the U.S. market constitute a type of neo-protectionist barrier. Agricultural exporters and livestock producers have witnessed how regulations and controls have multiplied, in line with the bioterrorist legislation that came into effect at the end of 2003. The United States has not managed to —nor has it wanted to—propose its security agenda as a matter of mutual interest, through which what Colin Powell once called a “zone of confidence”<sup>18</sup> could emerge. Rather, a lack of trust has been the dominant tone.

The Mexican-U.S. border is a dynamic border with an intensity that cannot be easily compared to any other in the world. Along its 3000 kilometers, there are 400 million border crossings each year, of which nearly 253 million are pedestrian crossings. It has been calculated that 98 percent of bilateral trade —which reached a level of US\$400 billion in 2006— takes place across that border. According to reports from the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (the Northern Border College), Tom Ridge’s aspiration of balancing security with free trade and agility in the transit of individuals who legitimately enter the United States is merely a laudable intention since, in the words of the president of the Northern Border College, Jorge Santibáñez, U.S. security policy “has put the management of international immigration in the same category as the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and weapons trafficking.”<sup>19</sup>

Things could certainly be worse. It is true that efforts have been made to improve and facilitate border crossings. Between the two countries, it has been possible to conjure up a scenario of the impregnable fortress, and despite restrictions and stepped-up security measures, “a dynamic has been achieved that makes the U.S. obsession with security now compatible with trade flows and the transit of citizens who have legitimate reasons for visiting the United States.”<sup>20</sup>

U.S. and Mexican authorities concur on the need to invest considerable resources to prevent the border from becoming an obstacle to legitimate activities. However, little progress has been made to date toward this objective. Mexicans continue to be eligible for a visa that may be granted only after extensive data has been collected.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., translated from Spanish by the author. [Editor’s Note.]

<sup>18</sup> <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/ar/mexico/powell14.htm>, translated from Spanish by the author. [Editor’s Note.]

<sup>19</sup> Jaime Hernández Hernández, “Seguridad fronteriza hunde negocios,” *El Universal*, September 13, 2004, 1 and 4; and “El vía cruces. Cruzar la frontera se volvió un calvario para pequeños exportadores,” *Expansión* (September 29 to October 13, 2004): 28.

<sup>20</sup> Luis Ernesto Derbez Bautista, “Una frontera en franca evolución,” *El Universal*, August 9, 2004, 11.

Mexico was one of the first countries to be included in the U.S. Visit program, but entrance procedures into the United States can be long and annoying.

Beyond investment in technology to better control the entry of citizens and merchandise, Mexico's proposal for simultaneously moving forward with both the migration and security agendas was very logical and even provocative. The link between the two agendas was put in this way:

U.S. national security strategy would be strengthened by identifying the population currently living within its borders in legal limbo —meaning that this population is vulnerable to abuses and hindered from openly joining efforts by the responsible authorities to enforce the law. This is not simply a matter of recognizing their rights, but also making them fully responsible for fulfilling their civic obligations.<sup>21</sup>

Mexico's attempt to make the migration issue coincide with the increase in security levels has not been successful, nor will it succeed in the immediate future. There are a variety of reasons, but especially evident is the fact that despite all we share and all that sets us apart, our region has not managed to clearly identify the circle of issues within which cooperation would provide better results for implementing sovereign policies. For Mexicans, illegal immigration opens up a situation marked by abuse, and for the U.S., it demonstrates that its control over the population is highly vulnerable and probably susceptible to corruption, since it is impossible to explain how more than 6 million individuals neither have legal immigration status nor are in the process of acquiring it.

The United States finds itself facing an undeniable fact: its citizens coexist with millions of individuals who have violated its immigration laws for purely economic reasons. Ignoring the issue or attempting to address it unilaterally, without acknowledging the economic component, only leads to a reduced perception of security, since the world's greatest power has been shown to be incapable of controlling the problem through legal channels.

### **North America: A Tribute to Differences**

The North American community should make efforts to acknowledge its circle of common interests, which include many more than those on either side of the border initially want to recognize. The SPP is probably the first step in the right direction because it is a highly controversial attempt to reach a balance in the region's security concerns and prosperity priorities.

The objective of shared security is a magnificent opportunity for working together, if we can surpass restrictive visions and complexes, since, as Jorge Montaña has said, we can stop being anything but neighbors. Geographic determinism forces us to jointly

<sup>21</sup> Santiago Creel, "La migración y la seguridad entre México y Estados Unidos: caminos diferentes, metas comunes, nuevos aliados," *Foreign Affairs en español*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004).

address security matters.<sup>22</sup> If terrorism is the main issue on the agenda, Mexico is an invaluable ally and an ideal neighbor.

As already stated here, Mexico is not a country that encourages terrorism in any way. We are a country that receives very few immigrants from the countries considered to be potentially dangerous. Furthermore, despite the fears of some nativists, Mexico shares with its neighbor the values of individual freedom, the market economy and the entire symbolic model represented by the United States.

In 1993, Samuel Huntington published an essay that sparked an enormous controversy regarding the ways in which conflicts will take shape on the international scene after the decline of ideologies. He suggested that cultural factors will constitute the main driving force of conflict. Even the title of his article was revealing: “The Clash of Civilizations?”<sup>23</sup> In his text, he defined a set of elements characterizing Western civilization, and in contrast to Naipaul, he established that the West was not the universal civilization, and that only a group of countries sharing certain characteristics fully belonged to Western civilization. He stated that there is little resonance for ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, the rule of law, democracy, free markets and the separation of church and state in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist and Orthodox civilizations.<sup>24</sup>

There is no doubt that Mexico shares the values mentioned here, in some cases as something to aspire to, and in others, as a goal achieved after years of debate and struggle. Mexico is a country that aspires to political modernity in accordance with Western norms.

Definitively, the Mexican population cannot be considered —socially or culturally— a threat to U.S. security. On the contrary, the United States finds on its southern border a country that, albeit with resentment and mistrust derived from a stormy relationship, aspires to live in peace and to create greater prosperity for the region.

What perhaps have not been fully understood in some political, academic and media circles are the transformations experienced by Mexico in economic, demographic and political spheres, which should be reflected in a new foreign policy and crowned with a new relationship with the United States. If the United States considers these changes with greater perspective, it should realize that Mexico cannot continue to receive the same treatment it received 20 years ago.

## Paradigms in Transformation

Mexico was “hooked” into economic globalization with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993, however other issues such as national security, foreign policy and Mexico’s role in the world remained largely anchored to

<sup>22</sup> Jorge Montaña, *Misión en Washington 1993-1996* (Mexico City: Planeta, 2004), 273-274.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



doctrinaire matrices of the past.<sup>25</sup> This is due in part to national inertia, and in part because the door has not been opened in the United States to the possibility of thinking of a more generous integration scheme that is more politically attractive to the majorities. The debate around the type of relations that should be developed with the United States is evolving at coordinates very similar to those of the 1970s.

Strategic debate has been narrowing considerably since 2001. Any topics not resolved at previous moments have been removed from the discussion. However, if changes do not appear to be that significant in the area of international politics, the process of Mexico's integration into the U.S. economy is a seemingly irreversible trend. The interdependence between the two economies is astounding. Let us look at some data. In the 1990s Mexico became consolidated as one of the world's export powers. Its total trade volume in the year 2000 was 2.3 times greater than that of Russia. Or to compare it with another Latin American economy with a practically identical gross domestic product (GDP), Mexico's foreign trade volume is more than five times greater than that of Brazil.<sup>26</sup>

In 1993, one year before NAFTA, Mexico's total exports amounted to nearly US\$52 billion. Three years later, the figure had reached nearly US\$96 billion,<sup>27</sup> and by 2006, its total exports to the U.S. were just above US\$212 billion.

This process of becoming more connected internationally is accompanied by increasing integration into the U.S. economy. In 1992, two years before the free trade agreement with the United States and Canada went into effect, 81 percent of Mexico's exports were destined for the U.S. market; however by the end of that decade, the figure had increased to levels slightly above 88 percent, which in practice, is equivalent to almost complete dependence on the United States. In 2006, of Mexico's total exports of US\$250 billion, approximately US\$212 billion was concentrated in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

On the other side of the coin, imports are less concentrated. However, the figures are high, with a tendency to rise. In 1992, 71.2 percent of Mexico's imports came from the United States, and in 1999, they increased to 74.2 percent. In 2006, Mexico imported from the United States US\$131 billion.<sup>29</sup> In other words, what Mexico purchases from the United States—which means competitiveness, jobs and well-being for the U.S.—is greater than the total purchased from the United States by several European countries, such as Italy, France, Spain and England. Thus, if we measure the relationship of interdependence in terms of bilateral trade, Mexico should not be considered a burden in the region.

<sup>25</sup> Salinas de Gortari's foreign policy is summarized in Andrés Rozenthal, *La política exterior de México en la era de la modernidad* (Mexico City: FCE, 1993). An interesting and very complete analysis of foreign policy during the Zedillo administration (1994-2000) can be found in Humberto Garza and Susana Chacón, comps., *Entre la globalización y la dependencia. La política exterior de México, 1994-2000* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/ITESM, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> El País, *Anuario 2002* (Madrid: El País, 2002), 59.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.naftaworks.org>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.economia.snci.gob.mx>

<sup>29</sup> The data for 2002 has been taken from the *Anexo estadístico del Tercer Informe de Gobierno* (Mexico City: Poder Ejecutivo Federal, 2003), 328-329.

However, the connection between the two countries can be perceived in other ways beyond trade figures and consumer patterns. It is also important to consider demographic dynamics, since they offer clear elements for analysis. In a period of 30 years (1970-2000), Mexico's population doubled, and a significant portion migrated to large cities in Mexico or to the United States. The number of Mexicans living in the United States has increased enormously in recent years.

Today, between 10 and 12 million Mexicans live in the United States, and between 40 and 50 percent of them are undocumented, according to estimates received by the Pew Hispanic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Migration and trade figures demonstrate that the current degree of integration of the two countries is enormous, although many prefer to ignore this. "Strategic ignorance" is always an option for politicians but Mexico is clearly a country that has been *transnationalized* in economic and demographic terms.

### **North America: A Pipe Dream?**

Despite the convincing nature of trade and demographic statistics, as well as the political will of the Vicente Fox administration to redefine bilateral relations around new key points,<sup>30</sup> the foundations for deepening bilateral relations have not been established.

Because of this dilemma, many years have been lost to Mexico, which has been unable to find a meeting point between, on the one hand, its economic and demographic reality with a focus on the North American region, and on the other, a traditional foreign policy discourse that continues to be deeply entrenched in the nation's political class.<sup>31</sup>

It is true that Mexico is highly confused as to its place in the world. The revolutionary nationalism that holds together the PRI and the PRD is anachronistic for one of the world's export powers. However, this continues to be the dominant focus of these two political parties' discourse, and the generalized opinion is that the United States does not consider Mexico a real partner. This predominance of nationalism has an important reactive component, and has methodologically hindered any progress in reformulating national interests.

In this context, the region is experiencing a period of great ambiguity. Mexico defines its trade and economic interests separate from and sometimes in opposition to its foreign policy. And the United States defines its foreign and security policies as if Mexico were a country with which it has only insignificant exchanges, and as if it were potentially dangerous.

<sup>30</sup> Monica Serrano, "Bordering on the Impossible: US-Mexico Relations after 9/11," in Peter Andreas and Thomas Biersteker, *The Rebordering of North America* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Interesting analyses of Fox's foreign policy in the first years of his administration can be found, for example, in Rafael Vázquez, comp., *La política exterior de México bajo un régimen democrático* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés/UQR, 2002); and Rafael Fernández del Castro, comp., *Cambio y continuidad en la política exterior de México* (Mexico City: Ariel, 2002).

Few dare to state clearly that a North American focus is —by geographic, economic and demographic definition— of the highest priority for Mexico, and to a significant degree, for the United States as well.

Thus, we have an ongoing problem that sparks heated patriotic discussions on both sides of the border. The rhetoric does not exactly prevent moving forward in the integration of the North American region; but, it does create mistrust and reinforce prejudices. Nor does patriotic propaganda endanger bilateral relations, which are handled with a great deal of pragmatism. However, what we have is far from an ideal situation.

It is worth asking ourselves seriously and directly whether the United States is interested in developing a different relationship with Mexico. The very year that NAFTA was approved, in his article on the clash of civilizations, Samuel Huntington proposed the concept of “torn countries,” and referred to three cases: Turkey, Russia and Mexico.

He stated that Mexico is the closest country to the United States, and one that debates whether it will remain part of Latin America or become part of North America. At the end of his article, he stated that in order to define to which civilization a “torn country” belongs, it must satisfy three requirements. The first is that its economic and political elites support the transformation. The second is that its people are in agreement with the redefinition, and the third is that the dominant groups in the civilization of destination are willing to receive the new convert. It is important to point out that in the text cited here, Huntington indicated that “all three requirements in large part exist with respect to Mexico.”<sup>32</sup>

If this was true in 1993, and if structural data for 2007 points toward greater convergence between Mexico and the United States, in the coming years, the two countries should find a place of collaboration and cooperation on security issues that, in turn, should generate greater trust. Montañó phrased it well when he wrote, “There is no way to ignore that we are neighbors, and thus we will never be able to disregard the importance of our contribution to the security equation. This is our only real playing card for achieving change, and we should use it legitimately and responsibly to maintain dialogue that is indispensable for Mexico.”<sup>33</sup>

Being indispensable for the security equation is mutual. Mexico is indispensable for guaranteeing U.S. security, and U.S. security is indispensable for Mexico. A terrorist attack perpetrated from Mexican territory would be disastrous for bilateral relations and indeed for the country’s viability. Mexico is convinced —for practical and ideological reasons— of the importance of cooperating, and consequently it does not deserve to be treated as if it were a potentially hostile country.

Being indispensable for the security equation implies acknowledging that the security of North America guarantees its future economic viability as well, in relation to major competitors such as the European Union and China. In this respect, Mexico comprises a market of more than 105 million inhabitants and is a fundamental actor in U.S. development, especially for some U.S. states in particular. A prosperous Mexico

<sup>32</sup> Huntington, “The Clash,” 44.

<sup>33</sup> Montañó, *Misión en Washington*, 273-274.

guarantees jobs and prosperity for North Americans, and conceiving of North America as a coherent economic and trade area offers the United States greater vigor and strength to compete with the economic and demographic giants in the East (China and India) and the West (the European Union) throughout the twenty-first century.

Being indispensable for the security equation means acknowledging that Mexican workers who migrate to the United States play a fundamental role in its competitiveness and demographic revitalization. At the same time, these workers serve as an oxygen tank for the Mexican economy, contributing nearly US\$25 billion each year with their remittances sent to families in Mexico. Migration should be understood as a problem that presents challenges to U.S. immigration laws, but never to its national security. This is the great difference that is sometimes forgotten.

Finally, being indispensable for the security equation means that in addition to geographic determinism, there is a new, inevitable circle of shared interests, as well as a set of values that historically urge us toward convergence. Consequently, and as the twenty-first century progresses and the major regional powers of Europe and China are consolidated, the two countries will have to abandon sovereignty-oriented logic and open up to a truly regional focus that includes Canada. In this focus, what is beneficial for Mexico is also useful for the United States, and vice versa —without, of course, losing sight of each country's specificities.

The possibility of Mexico and the United States becoming further distanced from each other in the coming years seems unthinkable, in the context of new threats and the configuration of a new international order. On the contrary, and without lapsing into voluntarism, we can assume that we are condemned in the long run to develop a better understanding of each other, due to the converging interests we share.

If Mexico is politically stable, it can generate the conditions for sustainable development, which not only offers prosperity, but also well paying jobs that do not force people to migrate. If Mexico is demographically stable, as predicted by experts for the coming decades, this will imply fewer tensions with its neighbor, and we will have a safer border. If Mexico benefits from infrastructure and investment, it will enhance the region's global competitiveness, strengthening the relative power of the United States in the world economic context.

In the current state of affairs, the issue of security represents an opportunity to come together in tactical and operational terms. We should clear the air of past offenses and tactless mistakes and focus squarely on the facts. The great challenge of the coming years is to move beyond tactical and operational aspects to a strategic focus that considers security in the long term. It seems evident to me that if we consider the panorama over the next 50 years, and we use our political will to overcome the prejudices each side has toward the other, U.S. security will inevitably be formulated from a perspective that unquestionably includes Mexico.

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