

**THE UNITED STATES AND
MEXICO: THE NEGLECTED
RELATIONSHIP**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO: THE NEGLECTED RELATIONSHIP

by

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Mexico is in a violent struggle for existence. Powerful Mexican drug cartels use narco-terrorism to undermine Mexican efforts to reform governance and reestablish internal security. The violence routinely affects U.S. border cities and threatens to expand to broader U.S. areas. The U.S. and Mexico relationship has significantly improved over the past few years; however, the U.S. still neglects Mexico choosing to put a higher priority on addressing other issues outside of North America. Mexico is a first line of defense for the U.S. against crime, drugs, terrorism, arms trafficking, and human trafficking. In the midst of a massive Mexican offensive against the drug cartels, Mexico faces the very real possibility of failing as a state. Mexico is at the edge of a transformational period, politically. The U.S. has a vested interest in supporting Mexican efforts to improve security and economic prosperity. The U.S. must continue broad interagency support of Mexico by continuing to expand on current programs such as the \$1.4 billion Merida Initiative. U.S. failure to recognize the severity of the Mexican situation and take aggressive steps to assist the Mexican government, could contribute to a failed Mexican state and ultimately impact U.S. National Security.

THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO: THE NEGLECTED RELATIONSHIP

President-elect Obama was very pleased to meet today with Mexico's President Calderon, and he hopes this early meeting helps emphasize the high importance he places on the strong and deep relationship with Mexico.

—Presidential Press Secretary Robert Gibbs,
January 12, 2009.¹

While it is not the main causal factor, the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and other United States (U.S.) foreign policy issues have relegated maintaining the crucial relationship with Mexico to a secondary priority. Former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, comments the ongoing civil war in Mexico is a severe problem all but ignored by the U.S. government and the media and will be a crisis President Obama must face in 2009.² Despite these comments the U.S. and Mexico relationship has significantly developed over the past few years; however, the U.S. still neglects Mexico as we address other seemingly more pressing issues outside of North America. The fact is many common interests closely link the U.S. and Mexico's collective wellbeing.³ The relationship between the two countries is complex, plagued by distrust, and requires nurturing by both sides to stay positive.⁴

The implications of an unstable Mexico or an uncooperative relationship between the U.S. and Mexico are unsettling at best and critical to national security at worst. The relationship with Mexico is so critical and yet, like a family member, the U.S. often takes it for granted. Largely, Mexico is a first line of defense against crime, drugs, terrorism, arms trafficking, and human trafficking. In the midst of a massive Mexican offensive against drug traffickers, really narco-terrorism, Mexico faces the possibility of failing as a state. Narco-Terrorism is terrorism conducted to further the aims of drug traffickers. It

may include assassinations, extortion, hijackings, bombings, and kidnappings directed against judges, prosecutors, elected officials, or law enforcement agents, and general disruption of a legitimate government to divert attention from drug operations.⁵ If Mexico fails to suppress the narco-terrorist's violence and regain internal security, both the U.S. and Mexico will feel the effects on their economy, immigration, and national security.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has deeply affected the economic interdependence between the U.S. and Mexico. Since the ratification of NAFTA in November 1993⁶, trade between Mexico and the U.S. has increased from \$49 billion in 1994 to \$210 billion in 2007.⁷ Imports from Mexico account for about 11% of the total \$1.9 trillion in worldwide goods the U.S. imported in 2007, making Mexico 3rd behind China and Canada.⁸ Mexico exports about 80% of all its products to the U.S. while the U.S. exports about 12% of its products to Mexico.⁹ NAFTA also stimulated foreign investment within North America between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada but also drew funds from investors outside of NAFTA who saw the value of free trade in the region.¹⁰ The interdependence of the U.S. and Mexican economy may also have negative affects within Mexico. Because of the current trade balances and interdependence, the U.S. economy drives the Mexican economy, either in a typically positive direction or negative direction when there is a down turn in the international economy. To mitigate any decline in the U.S. economy, Mexico continues to attempt market diversification with limited success.¹¹ As demonstrated recently, the weakening of the U.S. stock market and decline of the dollar greatly affected Mexico's economy.¹² Migrant workers in the U.S. from Mexico are critical to a strong U.S. and Mexican economy; however, immigration is a contentious topic for both countries.

The Mexican migrant work force includes both legal and illegal immigrants raising some difficult U.S. social, economic and national security issues. A large percentage of Mexican immigrants take jobs that Americans do not desire to perform. While this is beneficial for the U.S. economy in many respects, it has negative impacts when the immigrants are illegal. This illegal immigration drives overall U.S. public opinion of Mexico and causes increased discrimination against legal immigrants.

Illegal immigration is a longstanding difficult issue the U.S. faces in its relationship with Mexico. In 2007, estimates of Mexican illegal immigrants currently in the U.S. range from six¹³ to twelve¹⁴ Million. Approximately 400 thousand Mexicans immigrate to the U.S., legally and illegally, yearly.¹⁵ That is a staggering number considering the population of the U.S. is about 300 million. President Felipe Calderon of Mexico, after taking office in December 2006, quickly spoke out against U.S. immigration policies.¹⁶ Specifically he believes the strengthening of border fences and increased border patrols will lead to additional deaths as illegal immigrants attempt crossings in more desolate areas of the border.¹⁷ Despite the rhetoric, President Calderon appears willing to work closely with the U.S., for the long term, to develop a lasting and mutually beneficial solution to immigration. He has introduced ideas in Mexico to limit illegal immigration and improve Mexican social services, increase domestic jobs, increase education opportunities, as well as aggressively lobby the U.S. for immigration reforms.¹⁸

The porous border provides many opportunities for crossings of illegal immigrants seeking a better life in the U.S.; however, it also poses a security threat. In addition to allowing easy movement of low wage workers, the 2000-mile border

between the U.S. and Mexico provides criminals or terrorists an unfettered gateway to plan, supply, and execute illegal activities within U.S. cities.

While illegal immigration can strain U.S. social services, allowing Mexico's government to fail in the struggle against drug cartels or allowing a terrorist attack by way of the Mexican border could have catastrophic consequences. If we hope to prevent an ungoverned Mexico and possible future terror attacks in the U.S., it is essential for the U.S. and Mexico to have comprehensive and mutually supporting, law enforcement, drug enforcement, border enforcement and immigration policies.

Another important security consideration in our relationship with Mexico revolves around Mexico's role as a leader in Latin America and with the Caribbean countries. By Latin American standards, Mexico has a strong economy, second only to Brazil. As a result, Mexico wields substantial influence with countries like Venezuela and Cuba. The U.S. has strained relations with these countries and can benefit from proxy communication through a friendlier Mexico. With this in mind, the U.S. must be careful not to undermine Mexico's prestige in Latin America. Mexico is very proud and wants to exert influence in both Latin America and North America. It is in the interest of the U.S. to help support Mexico's prestige in greater Latin America without giving the appearance that Mexico is merely a U.S. puppet state.¹⁹

Relationship History

As the U.S. looks to improve the future relationship with Mexico, it is important to review the rich history between the two countries. The U.S. has not always been the best neighbor. In the past, the U.S. had a tendency for involving itself in Mexican affairs. Mexicans have traditionally viewed this involvement as interventionism and stubbornly

attempted to block U.S. efforts. Since 1821, when Mexico gained independence from Spain, the U.S. periodically meddled diplomatically in Mexican internal affairs. The U.S. actively participated in armed invasions from 1846 to 1918.

The U.S. has a long history of meddling in Mexican affairs. During the Mexican struggle for independence from Spain, the U.S. envoy to Mexico, Joel Poinsett supported one revolutionary faction over another during the struggle for an independent government.²⁰ In addition, later in 1911, the U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson even helped to plot the overthrow of the Mexican President.²¹ Up until 2001, the U.S. government required extensive oversight into internal Mexican affairs as a condition of providing monetary aid to Mexico to combat drug trafficking.²² As recently as last year, Congress showed a desire to maintain oversight of internal Mexican affairs. In July 2008, Congress reluctantly compromised on the extent of oversight of their most recent aid initiative, the Merida Initiative.²³ These and other similar issues provide the lens through which Mexico views U.S. involvement or assistance.

U.S. and Mexico history is also rich with armed conflict. In 1846, the U.S. invaded Mexico and in 1847 after the Mexican/American war terminated, Mexico lost forty percent of its territory.²⁴ This conflict was a direct result of the independence of Texas and the battle of the Alamo in 1836.²⁵ The U.S. supported the independence of Texas and then annexed Texas in 1845.²⁶ In 1846, the U.S. President James Polk sent an emissary to Mexico to negotiate the purchase of California.²⁷ The Mexican President, Jose Herrera, refused to see the emissary, as he was not empowered to discuss the Texas issue.²⁸ Shortly after the failed negotiations on California, there was a border clash between the Mexican and American Armies at the Rio Grande and the Mexicans

killed or captured all of the Americans.²⁹ This brought a declaration of war from the U.S. Congress and almost two years later, the end of the war facilitated a huge increase in U.S territory at the expense of Mexico.³⁰

Later in 1914, the U.S. Marines landed at Veracruz and intervened in a power struggle after the assassination of President Francisco Madero.³¹ Two years later, in 1916, the U.S. launched the Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa in response to Villa's raids on U.S. border towns.³² Looking holistically at the U.S. propensity for interventionism and military expeditions in Mexico, it is understandable that Mexico views the U.S. with a wary eye.

Culture and Politics

According to former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, Jeffrey Davidow, Mexico goes out of its way to avoid appearing subservient to the U.S. in most diplomatic issues.³³ Mexico rebuffs simple gestures of good faith by the U.S. due to stubborn nationalistic Mexican views. Examples include the U.S. offer of aid for flood victims in 1999 or a Nun in 2000 seeking passports for orphans to travel to the U.S. for medical care.³⁴ Because of the history of intervention, Mexican educators and elders inculcate their children early in their lives, with the notion they needed to fear any outsider as the outsider would surely intervene in Mexico and the result would not favor Mexico. This loathing of intervention is so acute that Mexico has a National Museum of Interventions. Schoolchildren in Mexico City visit the Museum where they see displays of numerous foreign invasions.³⁵ Teachers instruct all schoolchildren in Mexico on past foreign interventionism.³⁶ One of the greatest insults is to label a Mexican politician as pro-American.³⁷

In spite of Mexican fear of intervention, the U.S. must remember Mexico is a key neighbor and the U.S. must invest substantial time to foster that relationship. Mexico does not want direct U.S. intervention in Mexican internal affairs but realizes it does need U.S. attention and support. If the U.S. engages correctly, Mexico will be more receptive. However, if the U.S. fails to consider Mexico's strong feelings on interventionism and sovereignty, it will perpetuate these historical and residual ill feelings. Feelings often expressed in the press.

Mexico teeters on the edge of a transformational period, politically. President Vicente Fox's historic election in 2000 broke a 70-year rule by an authoritarian political party. The political transformation continued with the election of President Felipe Calderon in 2006, also from President Fox's party. One of the opposition parties continues to dispute the legitimacy of President Calderon and claims their candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador actually won the election, however, that has not stopped President Calderon from moving his agenda into Congressional and public debate.³⁸

Despite the overall slow progress in political reform, it is encouraging to see the political system improve. This political struggle in and of itself is evidence of progress. In the past, the majority party ruled in an authoritarian manner without adequate checks and balances. Political moderates credit President Ernesto Zedillo, who left office in November 2000, as instrumental in introducing reforms late in his term. This paved the way for the change to the multi-party political process. Still, Mexico's three party Congress is slow to act on any significant issues and very little happens legislatively without deep compromises from one or more of the parties. The democratic process in

Mexico is complex and still quite corrupt but President Calderon and other key allies are struggling to push for a wide range of reforms with some success.

Mexico is moving in the right direction with their political process by increasing political reforms, conducting relatively transparent elections, and allowing greater involvement of all political parties. It is in the interest of the U.S. for Mexico to have a democratic government. Without a democratic government, Mexico would probably be a source of continual aggravation to the US leading to extreme national security risks. The U.S. currently has difficulty slowing illegal activity in the U.S. originating in Mexico even with considerable cooperation between the two countries. A non-democratic government in Mexico could exacerbate illegal activities in the U.S. by Mexican citizens.

Economics

It is in the U.S. interest to foster a strong relationship with Mexico and continue to develop economic opportunities between the two countries. While NAFTA has helped Mexico's economy, China overtook Mexico with regards to the value of imports to the U.S. in 2003.³⁹ Mexico's imports to the U.S. have remained stagnant at about 11% of total U.S. imports since 2004 while China's imports have gradually increased from 14% to almost 18%.⁴⁰ If this trend continues, and it certainly could with an unstable U.S. and Mexican relationship, Mexican poverty will increase, especially in its Southern states where poverty is already rampant. As poverty increases, desperation grows causing an increase in the incidence of illegal immigration to the U.S. adding to existing U.S. social concerns and the drain on infrastructure. Illegal immigrants, in the U.S. often have access to public health care and social assistance programs, all charged to the U.S. taxpayer.

An unstable Mexico or unstable U.S. relationship with Mexico could also reduce trade between the two countries. This could cause strong U.S. allies, such as Canada and Columbia, to reduce trade with Mexico, as well. It would be very difficult for the U.S. to promote investment and increase trade with an unstable partner. Businesses are leery of uncompensated risk and all things being equal choose to invest in other countries or regions with greater stability. The incentive for the U.S. to continue partnering with Mexico as part of NAFTA would be greatly reduced. The U.S. would likely invest more effort in individual trade agreements with other Latin America countries or securing agreement on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

President Calderon's current economic agenda is degraded by disagreement over desired changes on reinvestment of oil revenue, oil company reform, and tax reform. Since President Calderon took office in December 2006, he has embarked on an ambitious economic reform plan; however, a great deal of political infighting and the violent drug war has impeded the progress. Since taking office, President Calderon's primary economic accomplishment was a coalition with another political party to pass a state pension overhaul bill.⁴¹

Since the victory on the state pension bill, little has happened with his economic agenda. He has been unable to reform the state owned oil company, PEMEX, with legislation allowing some level of privatization.⁴² PEMEX is the sixth largest oil supplier to the U.S. and President Calderon contends Mexico must have some privatization to invest in new oil exploration, oil infrastructure, and reorganize for better efficiency.⁴³ There is a direct correlation between foreign investment in Mexico's oil sector and the fear of privatization for PEMEX's future. Without PEMEX privatization with outside

investment, the U.S. will likely look for other sources of energy to replace Mexican oil as oil production in Mexico is predicted to decline by 800,000 barrels a day by 2012.⁴⁴ Mexico will become a net importer of oil in 2017 and when that occurs it will have a significant impact on the Mexican government's ability to fund numerous critical infrastructure and social programs. PEMEX oil revenues account for approximately 40% of the Mexican government's budget.⁴⁵

Poverty and economic disparity between regions in Mexico will continue as problems for both the U.S. and Mexico. Economic development in Mexico is critical to improving the conditions in Mexico and ultimately improving the U.S. relationship with Mexico. The vast difference between per capita income in the U.S. and Mexico increases frustration, immigration, violent crime, and drug trafficking affecting both countries. The 2007 income per capita in the U.S. was \$46,040.00 compared to \$8,340.00 in Mexico.⁴⁶ Despite high hopes for Mexico after approval of NAFTA, the divide between Mexico and the U.S. has not narrowed as expected.⁴⁷ In fact, the divide between regions in Mexico has also widened causing extreme poverty in some areas while other areas have adapted better under NAFTA.⁴⁸

It is in the U.S. interest to support Mexico's efforts to reform economic policies and improve infrastructure to increase Mexican prosperity. If Mexico's prosperity improves, it supports U.S. interests regarding the economy, immigration, and national security. Without economic reforms and improved infrastructure, it is unlikely Mexico will reduce the internal gap between poverty and those with higher incomes.⁴⁹

Immigration

During 2003, the U.S. Border Patrol made 909,000 arrests on the border with Mexico and in 2004 1.1M arrests.⁵⁰ Even with the cooperation the U.S. currently has with Mexico, the estimated cost of illegal immigration at the state level is staggering. California estimates spending \$7.7 billion on education, \$1.4 billion on healthcare, and \$1.4 billion in prison costs for illegal immigrants.⁵¹ When these costs are coupled with other border states costs, the overall cost of illegal immigration to the US economy is stunning.

However, the U.S. must be careful with the way it views immigration and specifically how the approach is perceived in Mexico. Mexicans view immigration from Mexico to the U.S. as a basic right and that right extends to illegal immigration. The Mexican view of immigration strongly condones illegal immigration at all levels of society.⁵² On the other hand, most Americans view illegal immigration as a complete lack of respect for U.S. law.⁵³ There is also a limited Mexican belief that the U.S. intentionally designs immigration policies to increase deaths as a deterrent to illegal immigration.⁵⁴ These dissimilar perceptions make this issue difficult for both countries to reconcile.

A positive relationship with Mexico when dealing with the issue of immigration is critically important. With improvement of the U.S. and Mexican relationship in mind, President Bush chose Mexico as the destination for his first foreign visit in February 2001.⁵⁵ During this visit, he and President Fox committed to collectively resolve the immigration issues on both sides of the border. Immigration became the most significant issue discussed during the U.S. Presidential visit at President Fox's Guanajuato ranch.⁵⁶ Bush, a former Governor of Texas, was concerned about Mexico's alleged non-

compliance with a 1946 treaty on water access to the Rio Grande River; however, immigration issues even over shadowed this discussion.⁵⁷

Presidents Bush and Fox agreed to form a high-level commission to develop solutions to address the immigration issue.⁵⁸ The U.S. co-chairmen were Secretary Powell and Attorney General Ashcroft and the Mexican co-chairmen were Foreign Minister Castaneda and Interior Minister Creel.⁵⁹ The stature of the respective co-chairmen reflected the importance both Fox and Bush placed on the success of the commission. Despite initial high hopes for the commission, the U.S. and Mexico accomplished very little work due to diverging priorities of both countries. Unfortunately, the immigration issue remains unresolved after President Fox's departure in 2006 and President Bush's departure in January 2009.

Immigration was on the forefront again with the inauguration of President Felipe Calderon in December 2006. Early in 2007, President Calderon pressured President Bush to look at the U.S. approach to immigration reform and work to address the root causes of illegal immigration rather than build fences.⁶⁰ During the 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign, the issue arose again but faded from the debate as the candidates desperately tried not to alienate Hispanic voters.⁶¹

Despite some of President Calderon's public statements, Mexico appears to deliberately disengage on immigration in order to avoid addressing the second and third order social issues of unemployment and poverty associated with any solution.⁶² Remittance back to Mexican citizens living in Mexico from Mexicans in the U.S. amounts to a huge revenue flow. In 2004, Mexican immigrants in the U.S. remitted approximately \$16 billion back to their families in Mexico. These payments are the third

largest cash producing enterprise behind tourism and oil exports and amount to between two to four percent of the Mexican Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁶³ By 2007, the amount grew to \$23 billion but will likely decrease in 2008 due to the U.S. economic recession.⁶⁴ In addition, the Mexican state of Zacatecas has a monetary matching program in which each dollar an immigrant remits for investment in the local community, the state invests three dollars.⁶⁵ The federal government is considering a similar program, nationwide as well as allowing dual citizenship in the U.S. and Mexico.⁶⁶ These programs give the impression the Mexican government encourages immigration to the U.S..

National Security

While President Calderon has aggressively attacked drug trafficking and other criminal enterprises since his inauguration in December 2006, these illegal activities still affect U.S. interests. These relatively unchecked criminal activities in Mexico contribute to numerous social problems in the U.S., not the least of which are overburdened criminal justice systems, overcrowded prisons, and overtaxed public health systems. If our relationship with Mexico turns uncooperative these strains on our systems would likely magnify. With the ongoing Mexican drug war and internal struggle against corruption due to drug trafficking, Mexico is at risk of becoming a failed nation. The Mexican government is not well equipped to handle this drug-funded corruption. An uncooperative or ungoverned Mexico would pose an extreme risk to the U.S.. If the government failed, the cartels would welcome an increased U.S. struggle with crime caused by Mexican citizens.

Mexicans view unfettered travel to the U.S. as a human right. This belief likely stems in part from the U.S. 1800s annex of half of the Mexican territory in the Mexican/American war. Regardless of the reason, it is likely an uncooperative or ungoverned Mexico would encourage crime and drugs north of the border. To put this in perspective, the U.S. and Mexico now enjoy unprecedented cooperation in combating drugs, combating illegal arms movements, and sharing law enforcement intelligence. In January 2007, Mexico extradited four major drug traffickers, including the head of the Gulf cartel, Osiel Cardenas.⁶⁷ Cardenas is wanted in Texas for drug charges as well as assaulting and threatening to kill U.S. federal agents. Despite this level of cooperation, Mexico had 2,000 drug related killings in 2006.⁶⁸ Since the beginning of 2007, just after President Calderon took office, estimates indicate as many as 7,000 people were killed in drug related violence in Mexico through November 2008.⁶⁹ It is reasonable to believe that more of this violence would spill into the U.S. without the cooperation Mexico and the U.S. now enjoys. If the Mexican government failed, the violence would undoubtedly become cataclysmic.

Cooperation on drug trafficking and other crime linking our two countries is always contentious and must be carefully managed. However, over the past 18 months or so, Mexico is nearing a state of chaos. In a USA Today Opinion Editorial, Ralph Peters states “Even Mexico – the state most vital to our security – faces a disintegrative level of lawlessness”.⁷⁰ In early January 2009, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the existence of contingency plans to respond to threats posed by Mexican lawlessness in border communities adjacent to U.S. cities. Specific concerns include cross border Mexican drug gang criminal activity in the U.S. or Mexican

refugees massing at U.S. border crossing points.⁷¹ In response to similar concerns, in March 2007, President Bush agreed to approve the Merida initiative designed to help Mexico maintain pressure on the drug cartels.⁷² Merida was so named after the location in Mexico of the original meeting in which the U.S. pledged \$1.4 billion over 3 years; however, in May 2008 congress threatened to reduce the amount to \$350 million for one year only and make the rest contingent on drug enforcement results by Mexico.⁷³

Mexico discounted the conditions based approval and considered it an affront to Mexican sovereignty.⁷⁴ Congress was within their right to provide oversight to the funding but they failed to recognize the significance of this action in light of Mexico's ongoing violent fight against drug traffickers and Mexico's sensitivities to our meddling in their affairs. Mexico has made tremendous efforts to attack drug trafficking and the violent crime associated with it and President Calderon has taken great personal and political risk to address these issues. At the Merida conference, in an unusual display of Mexican dependence, President Calderon asked the U.S. for assistance to combat the drug traffickers.⁷⁵ Never before has a Mexican President asked for or received that much direct U.S. involvement or assistance. President Bush responded, by pledging financial and interagency support. However, the U.S. sends mixed signals to Mexico through Congresses' inaction and delay in implementing Merida.

Ultimately, Congress approved a \$400 million allotment in June 2008 with reduced imposed conditions for additional funding of \$1 billion over several years.⁷⁶ These reduced conditions are a good step by Congress in showing support for President Calderon and understanding Mexican culture as the Mexican government continues to fight the drug cartels. The U.S. Congress should embrace the October

2008 news where Mexican prosecutors announced the arrest of five personnel in the government's own attorney generals organized crime unit for taking bribes as high as \$450 thousand a month.⁷⁷ The Mexican Attorney General also announced additional firings related to the bribes and a reorganization to address other potential corrupt personnel.⁷⁸ The U.S. needs to implement and build on the strategy launched by Merida to support Mexico in their fight, balancing the oversight functions of Congress with the flexibility to rapidly support Mexico, with both funding and interagency cooperation.

The Way Forward

As the U.S. looks forward to stronger relations with Mexico, it is wise to build upon positive interagency cooperation between the two countries. Cooperation began to build with President Fox and has continued to increase with President Calderon at an accelerated pace. The U.S. Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Energy, Transportation (DoD, DoS, DoJ, DoE, DoT), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) must be highly engaged with Mexico to improve governance. Mexico has exhibited an unprecedented level of cooperation in economic and security issues and the U.S. must reciprocate. The failure to recognize Mexico's overtures to the U.S. and the gravity of the Mexican security situation impedes the U.S. ability to act collectively with Mexico to address common interests. Ultimately, the failure of the U.S. to act in concert with Mexico could result in degraded relations, increased distrust, and quite possibly a failed Mexican state.

Mexico is considered a middle-income country and, as such, has not received a large amount of financial assistance from the U.S. in the past. The Merida initiative is a great step but is solely directed at narcotics control and law enforcement activities. This

aid package represents a strong commitment to Mexico and the U.S. needs to continue this support more broadly and until the cartel power is significantly diminished. One of the intents of this aid is to increase safety and security in Mexico to set conditions for additional foreign investment and increased economic growth. The U.S. needs to build on this and develop aid for job programs, infrastructure improvements, and other economic improvements. The U.S. needs to help Mexico with outside business investment to allow increased economic growth as a member of NAFTA.

Although the NAFTA agreement was initially implemented in January 1994, some provisions of NAFTA have only recently been fully implemented.⁷⁹ Mexico and the U.S. had a long-standing trade dispute on sugar and high fructose corn syrup that included tariffs and taxes outside of NAFTA. Finally, only after the World Trade Organization (WTO) issued a ruling, the two countries agreed to eliminate the taxes and tariffs in 2006.⁸⁰ In addition, Mexico and the U.S. continue to address other trade disputes dealing with the importation of tuna, avocados, and other agricultural products to the U.S..⁸¹ Ultimately, all of the trade disputes should be resolved for optimum economic growth in Mexico.

The U.S. should continue to expand opportunities for trade with Mexico and resolve issues inhibiting trade. Despite a substantial trade deficit between the two countries, Mexico continues to expand its U.S. export market.⁸² Unfortunately, some in Congress feel the U.S. should withdraw from NAFTA. This is evidenced by the introduction of Congressional Resolution 22 expressing the “sense of Congress that the U.S. should withdraw from NAFTA due to increased trade deficits, and potential health and security risks of permitting Mexican trucks to transport goods throughout the United

States.”⁸³ House Resolution 40 also expresses concern about engaging in a NAFTA superhighway and development of a North American Union.⁸⁴ The U.S. must overcome these isolationist tendencies, specifically with Mexico to ensure continued economic development in Mexico.

Immigration reform will continue its importance in both countries. The priority for President Calderon is clearly the crime associated with drug cartels; however, he has made his opinions clear on immigration issues during his time in office.⁸⁵ When you look at U.S. strategic objectives for immigration reform in the simplest form, it is very possible to reach agreement on immigration in the near future. Essentially the U.S. end state for Mexican immigration is to substantially reduce illegal immigration to a point where, statistically, it is an insignificant issue. Most Americans understand we cannot totally eliminate illegal immigration. An attempt to define the exact point of insignificance is perhaps fruitless at the strategic level. The U.S. ultimately wants an immigration policy that is acceptable to the populations of both countries because both will live with the consequences and must enforce the policy for it to be effective.

The U.S. must take a consolidated approach with Mexico to fully address both Mexican interests and American interests. The key to this is to establish mutually beneficial immigration and border security policies to address the following specific interests of both countries. First, reduce the application and processing time required to receive a visa for Mexicans to enter the U.S. legally. Perhaps couple this with increased immigration ceilings for Mexican citizens in an acknowledgement of the number of U.S. jobs Mexicans fill which U.S. citizens do not desire to fill. Second, decrease the perceived prejudicial treatment of Mexican immigrants by U.S. citizens. Third, resolve

the issue of amnesty for current illegal Mexicans in the U.S.. Forth, obtain agreement and mutual enforcement on border security policies. Fifth, establish U.S. supported Mexican social programs to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunities.

Reaching immigration reform agreement requires the U.S. to make perhaps a disproportionate, relative to Mexico's commitment, economic and political commitment to Mexico but it is a wise strategic investment. Over time, it is politically feasible to meet the immigration objectives as stated above. The U.S. and Mexico have the means to accomplish immigration reform acceptable to both countries. A true consolidated approach to immigration reform will address the key Mexican interests of unfettered movement to the U.S. and increased quality of life for immigrants in the U.S.. For the U.S., immigration reform as detailed above addresses the interests of undocumented workers and greater cooperation on border enforcement. Reform provides a path to reach common agreement to address the current illegal immigrants through earned amnesty without encouraging more illegal immigrants as with blanket amnesty in 1986.⁸⁶ This type of cooperation on immigration reform is suitable to resolve immigration concerns and lead to increased national security with cooperative border enforcement.

Currently, the relationship between the Mexican and U.S. military is very strong. In a strong show of support after the August 2005 Hurricane Katrina, President Fox provided a Mexican Navy ship and ground vehicle convoy with food and supplies as well as 184 Mexican military personnel for a 20 day mission in Texas and Mississippi. This was the first time Mexican forces have deployed to the U.S. since 1840 and during the mission, Mexico provided approximately 170,000 meals and distributed 184,000 tons of supplies.⁸⁷

President Calderon strongly supports increased military-to-military cooperation and directed increased engagement with the U.S. military.⁸⁸ The increased cooperation has led to numerous military-to-military engagements. Examples include the following. Mexico posted a Navy Liaison Officer to the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM).⁸⁹ Mexican Army General Officer visits to USNORTHCOM headquarters in 2007 and 2008.⁹⁰ In addition, U.S. Army North conducts numerous engagement activities including an annual Border Commanders Conference, U.S. General Officer visits to Mexico, U.S. and Mexican Army equipment technical assistance visits, and routine phone conversations between counterparts.⁹¹ Many of the engagements are unprecedented and indicate opportunities for increased cooperation in joint exercises, military education, training, and equipment transfers.⁹² The U.S. must continue to build on this cooperation for the future with full resources and interagency involvement. The interagency involvement of both countries will help build government-to-government relationships more broadly.

In March 2005, Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. signed the security and prosperity partnership agreement.⁹³ This agreement, while somewhat symbolic, seeks to improve security and economic cooperation between the countries. Because of the agreement, numerous high level working groups have been established to address pandemics, port security, border security, energy and numerous economic issues.⁹⁴ These working groups span the spectrum of interagency cooperation from both governments. It is essential to continue this cooperation and increase cooperation with DHS, DoT, and USDA on issues such as allowing Mexican trucks access to U.S. roads and agreeing on imports of certain agricultural items.

The Merida initiative incorporates the U.S. whole of government approach providing much more than a normal aid package. It is part of a new strategy in which the U.S. and Mexico partner to address the common threat of crime involved with drug trafficking.⁹⁵ Due to U.S. fears of corruption, there is no direct transfer of money; however, the U.S. provides state of the art equipment, repair parts, and maintenance support for items such as helicopters, surveillance planes, armored vehicles, inspection devices, computer equipment, forensics equipment, and software.⁹⁶ In addition, numerous U.S. government agencies provide personnel to the Mexican government to assist with technical training and cooperation. The equipment and technical personnel will assist across a wide spectrum of the Mexican government ministries or departments covering military, attorney general, public security, immigration service, communication & transportation, customs, intelligence, treasury, courts, and prisons.⁹⁷ This is a comprehensive package setting the stage for increased security for the U.S. and Mexico.

The increased cooperation with Mexico, including the unprecedented economic aid, indicates a positive trend for the future. The U.S. needs to continue to build trust and increase cooperation on security issues in both countries. The U.S. should expand recent programs that securely speed travel of pre-screened cargo and personnel across the border.⁹⁸ The U.S. should partner with Mexico to increase job opportunities in order to decrease illegal immigration. The U.S. should increase cooperation between border patrol and law enforcement agencies of both countries with the goal to have reasonable control of the border and direct observation of all likely illegal immigration crossing points. It will take much diplomatic and interagency work to mutually define reasonable

control but the important point is work to improve the present control on both sides of the border through cooperation and shared resources. Both countries need to increase capabilities to track and isolate drug trafficking money and component ingredients used for drug production.⁹⁹ The progress on security cooperation with Mexico is extremely encouraging but both countries must embrace the current cooperation, find ways to improve, and mutually support efforts to address shared threats.

Conclusion

Over the past two years, the level of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico has been phenomenal and gone a long way to address the neglect of the past. This cooperation is a result of the recognition by the U.S. that Mexico left alone could become a failed state. A failed state on the U.S. border has great strategic security implication for the U.S.. It is critical to continue support of NAFTA, including full implementation of all provisions, to maintain economic integration of North America. The U.S. must assist Mexico with developing economic opportunities in poverty-stricken areas of Mexico to provide hope and jobs for Mexicans in desolate areas. This is critical for the economy but also it is crucial to address root causes of drugs, security and illegal immigration issues.

The countries must resolve the issue of illegal immigration by adopting a consolidated approach to immigration reform that addresses the key interests of both countries. This will require the U.S. to lead the effort and make controversial concessions to Mexico. However, in the long-term it will increase cooperation with immigration enforcement, border patrol enforcement, and overall security of both countries. The U.S. must continue to support President Calderon in his efforts to attack

the drug cartels. The security threat from drug trafficking directly affects both the U.S. and Mexico. In addition, the second and third order effects in the areas of medical care, overcrowded prisons, and overburdened courts are a drain on both economies.

Increased cooperation in drug enforcement will lead to greater overall security in the areas of not only drugs but also violent crime, arms trafficking, port security, and terrorism.

The relationship between the U.S. and Mexico is at a critical tipping point. The actions the U.S. takes over the next few years will dictate whether Mexico continues as a close partner, resentful sibling, or failed state. Our countries collective wellbeing is closely linked by economics, history, and security concerns. Both countries must work hard to continue cooperation and break down the past barriers of distrust. This is a historical point in the relationship with Mexico and the U.S. must act quickly, steadily and responsibly for the improvement of this critical relationship and vital security linchpin in North America.

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