

Mexico and the North Pacific

José Juan de Olloqui*

As has been repeated time and again, the fact that Mexico belongs to the North American Free Trade Agreement does not exclude our relationship with other countries and regions, and this is as it should be. In this context, Mexico's interest in the Pacific takes on special importance, given that there has been a relationship lasting several centuries, although the success obtained has been less than satisfactory.

It is, in fact, common to encounter optimistic figures on our relation with the countries of the Pacific Basin, because they incorporate statistics on investment or trade, including those derived from our relationship with the United States, which is not based on our access to a common ocean but on being united as close neighbors. In like fashion, the growing relationship with Canada—and now with Chile, a possible new partner in the Free Trade Agreement—is due to causes having little to do with being Pacific Rim countries.

In the case of Mexico, as a neighbor of the United States it is necessary, more than to maximize, to optimize our relations with that country. I have put forward this conception since 1971, after being named Mexico's Ambassador to the United States, when I noted that "Mexico needs to diversify its foreign trade, without ideological distinctions, with all the world's countries, so as not to depend on a single market," and in order to be able to exercise all its political and economic options. Throughout my activity

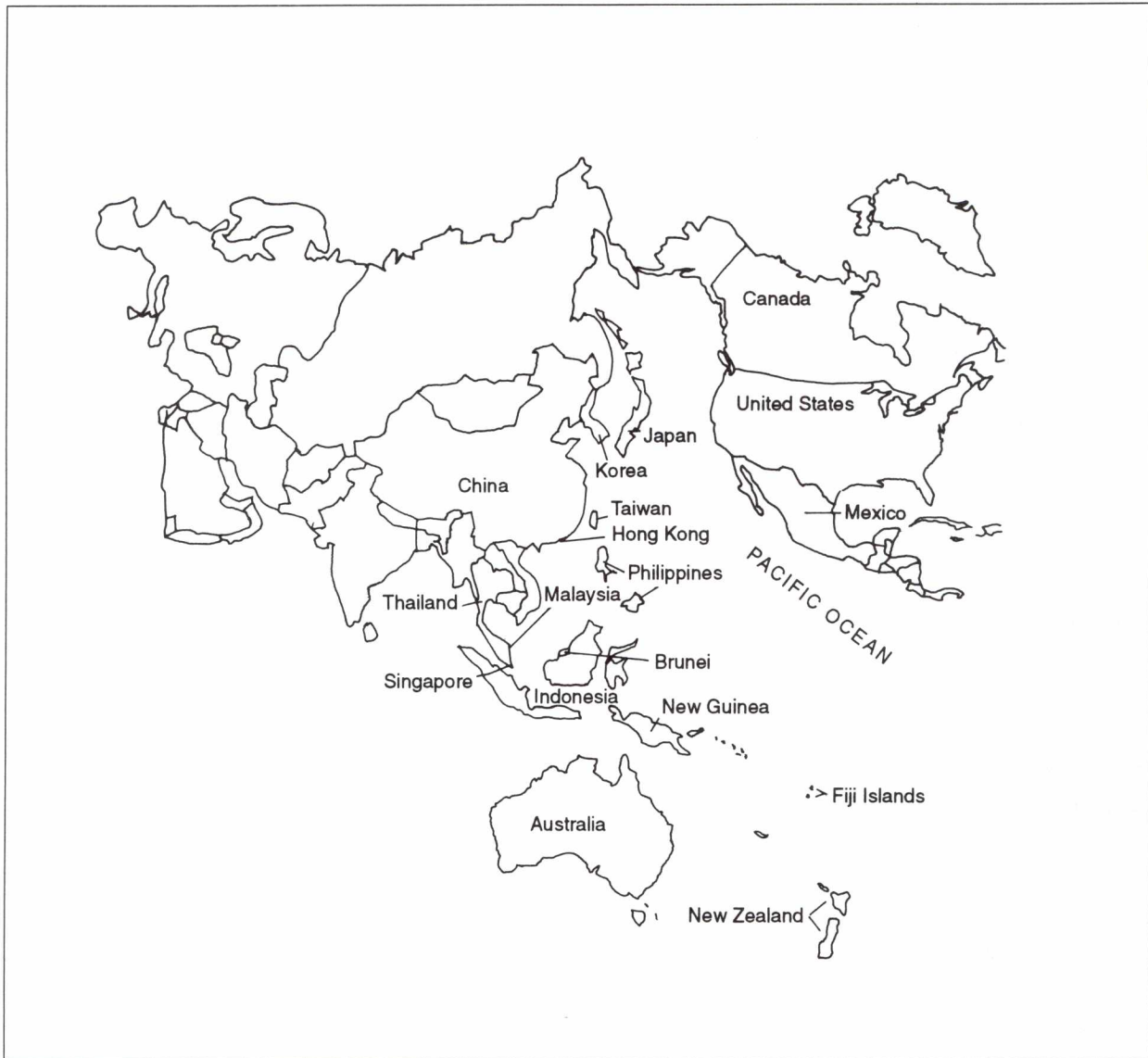
in the sphere of foreign relations I have insisted, among other things, on the importance of broadening our capacity for action *vis à vis* the United States, without engaging in unnecessary confrontations with that country, with which we are united by geography and the reality of its power. In other words, we must seriously seek a genuine independence and not limit ourselves to rhetorically antagonizing the U.S. while doing nothing, thereby becoming more dependent every day.

We may take as our starting point the idea that *the seas do not divide; they unite*. Thus we should approach the Pacific nations on the basis that, simply, *we are their other shore*, facing the same ocean.

All the Asian Pacific countries are of great importance for our nation. Examples include Australia and Singapore. Nevertheless, in today's world, it is interesting to take a look at the regionalizations or sub-regionalizations within the overall framework of "globalization."

I think it would be very important to explore the possibility of integrating, to some degree, the countries belonging to the Northern Pacific Basin, that is, Canada, the United States and Mexico, together with Japan and Korea—that will eventually reunify and has a total population of 67 million inhabitants, 44 million in the South and 23 in the North. China and Russia are options which would need to be considered within this schema. The idea of forming a "Sub-Basin" would, moreover, be an additional element that could be used within the Free Trade Agreement.

* Former Mexican Ambassador to the United States.



The Pacific Rim nations.

Our closeness to the United States is very attractive to Japan and China, taking into account such factors as skilled labor, raw materials, etc., so long as the establishment of maquiladoras could be handled in such a way as not to cause problems with United States trade unions.

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In fact, processes of integration are underway in the Pacific, and as the "other shore" it is worth our while to take them into consideration, even if we are not contemplating definitive economic or military commitments.

Contacts regarding North Pacific Rim integration will be academic and informal at the beginning. They will be followed by a growing economic presence and greater political efforts.

While the purpose of this article is not to develop these ideas,

the usefulness of establishing priorities may be outlined. In particular, I consider it fundamental to pay greater attention to the North Pacific. And within that subregion, it is necessary to achieve closer relations with Japan and Korea.

If we put forward prudent, pertinent and fulfillable initiatives in this regard, they could be funda-

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mental for the future. If the tendency to “regionalization” becomes more accentuated, they would help prevent us —as promoters— from being left out.

This does not mean that the central and southern parts of the Pacific Basin would cease to interest us. Suffice it to say that it has become a ritual, during each administration, for the president to travel not only to the United States, Canada and sometimes a number of European capitals, but also to Japan, China, and formerly to the USSR as well. This is all to the good, if these visits are part of a “foreign policy project” which is followed through. If this is not the case, then they are merely goodwill visits and therefore of a cosmetic nature.

Our geographic location makes us simultaneously North American and Central American, at the same time that we face the North Atlantic, the Pacific and the Caribbean; but, above all, we are Latin Americans. Mexico is a highly multidimensional country, since in addition to the aforementioned characteristics, we are Spanish speakers, and out of the many races that speak Spanish, one of every three individuals is Mexican. We are also multiracial and have our own culture, which in reality has been more a civilization than a culture. Despite everything that is presently occurring in our country, we are an emerging power.

In addition to our geopolitical nature, perhaps the most important thing is that we have a national

character, which we could define as a population’s will to rule its own destiny and determine its level of international activity. It is necessary to continue affirming this in Mexico. Otherwise, setbacks could produce the morale of a defeated people.

Neither is it advisable to engage in imprudent activism surpassing our economic capacities, since this would be counterproductive. History is filled with examples.

In this sense, we should avoid unnecessary conflicts with our NAFTA partners. We should never forget the fact that Bismarck drew closer to some European countries and away from others to the extent

that this served Prussia, but without forgetting that Russia was there as a huge neighbor, and that he always acted in accordance with his country’s best interests. Naturally, we should act in the same way towards the United States.

Despite its current difficulties, Mexico possesses the necessary harmony in the elements making up the nation’s power, such as its territory, natural resources and an abundant population, a civilization more than a culture and, fortunately, a splendid geographical location. This distinguishes it from countries such as Argentina, Australia or Canada, which, despite their size and abundant natural resources, have a limited population, which is unfavorable, or whose geographical position (in the case of the first two) is unenviable.

Singapore and Hong Kong remain city-states, without the basis that a country such as ours can have; on the other hand, it is true that they have had an excellent coordination between the government and the private sector. In our case, private enterprise has been too cautious, perhaps due to a lack of governmental orientation spurring it to participate in our possible adventure in Asia and many other places.

It is important that Mexico, with a certain degree of selfishness, seek to capitalize on its geographical

location and its specific weight in the region. Thus, it is indispensable that, as has been the case so far, the various forums and mechanisms for integration of the Pacific Basin not include countries which lack access to this ocean, even if they carry out more trade with the Asian region than we do —such as Brazil. Let us be frank: competition is a good thing, but when one is competing for limited resources or markets, the less competitors the better, and any element can be of assistance in this regard.

We should not forget that the European bloc is, by definition, closed to non-European countries, although Mexico is the first Latin American country to achieve special treatment.

We cannot belittle the fact that in the '90s there will be a major adjustment in the world's most important markets, such as the United States and Europe. The former needs to correct its trade deficits, while the latter must confront the dismemberment of the Eastern bloc.

In the same way that Switzerland's model of direct democracy, which is closest to that of Athens, cannot be applied to Mexico —due to our territorial dimensions, among many other aspects— one cannot expect to achieve the same economic results from the application of other models, including those coming from within our own hemisphere. Let us see why:

First. The demands of the future will tend to be more stringent, even under development models which were successful in the past. For example, the Asian Pacific Rim countries were very successful in adopting a strategy of outward-oriented growth in the late '60s and early '70s, due to their great discipline and long-term sacrifice —a kind of sacrifice which Latin America should have undertaken. Let us note in passing that these countries did not cease to be protectionist, and continue to be so; one need only note the current U.S./Japan trade conflicts.

Second. The Asian countries' success was largely due to the fact that the United States was experiencing a growth of its markets while, on the contrary, Latin American countries took on debt during the '80s and were unable to compete in exports to the United States. All this led to Latin America's "lost decade," which did away with the over 100-year advantage we had due to our having won independence before those countries (with the exception of Japan and Thailand, which were never colonized).

Third. The Pacific's most dynamic countries succeeded in easily conquering world markets, at a time when they were the only ones following this strategy. Now the number of countries with the same goals has risen considerably.

It might not be a pointless exercise to begin thinking, once again, about a specifically Mexican development model rather than adopting those of other countries which have a different geographical location and neighbors, small populations and different experiences of political development. It is likewise necessary to design a political strategy with clear objectives and a well worked out course of action. This means having the conceptual and action-oriented tools which will provide us with additional advantages with

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regard to other Pacific Basin nations. Mexico can play a key role in the ongoing shift in the relation of forces.

This is also the time for reflection on what is going on in that section of Latin America that has scarcely begun to involve itself in the processes underway, in the South American Pacific area. Ecuador and Central America are to a certain degree marginal; Colombia has yet to get involved.

Despite his recent visit to Japan, the blood ties linking Peru's president to that country have still not been translated into significant achievements; so far the conditions for massive investment in Peru have not been present. Since their economic situation is improving, the two countries are currently looking towards this occurring. It is worth mentioning that Asian countries are more interested in a country's stability or economic potential than in questions of human rights or democratic conceptions.

Chile is a different case: it has a long Pacific coastline as well as the Easter Islands and a long maritime tradition, although its population is only 15 million. We should keep in mind that, like Venezuela in the Caribbean, Chile could become our rival despite the cordial relations of friendship we have with both countries. Curiously enough, in seeking parity with the region's "Big Three" (Mexico, Brazil and Argentina), Chile and Venezuela could reduce Mexico's position without affecting that of Brazil and Argentina; this could be observed in multilateral agencies in particular. They will not become part of the "Triumvirate," but they could align forces to the detriment of Mexico.

Links with this region must also be attended to, since our ties with Central and South American Pacific Rim countries have derived from historic causes which, until now, have been the key factor in our relations.

We should play even more of a determining role, and have already done so. Costa Rica became conscious of its Pacific location and joined the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) in 1991, during PBEC's 24th General International Meeting, held in Guadalajara; this was largely due to Mexico's initiative and support.

Obviously, to the extent that trade increases and becomes more liberalized, and capital mobility exists, there will be a greater economic growth of our market and a rise in Mexico's ability to exert international influence. Not everything will be as attractive and profitable as previously, given that competition is more intense, but I am convinced that we can achieve this goal.

We are moving in the right direction, but we should not view the opening of trade as a panacea or believe that development will be achieved effortlessly. Nor can we play the role for which we are naturally suited unless we have a plan and clear objectives in the context of the region's political tasks.

Mexico cannot accept any limitation of polarity, bipolarity or tripolarity; instead, it must make its decisions autonomously with the aim of recovering the prestige it has lost, without forgetting that nothing can or should stop Mexico in its path to greatness.⁵

