

# *U.S.-Mexican* RELATIONS IN THE YEAR *2000*<sup>1</sup>

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The last direct U.S. interventions in Mexico's internal affairs occurred during the Mexican Revolution: Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson's participation in the murder of President Madero in 1913, military intervention in Veracruz in 1914 and the punitive expedition in northern Mexico in 1916 in search of Pancho Villa. After that a more civilized and harmonious relationship between the two countries began, and later U.S. administrations have been more respectful of Mexican sovereignty.

Mexico has never been a threat to the United States. Since the founding of the Mexican Republic, and especially in the twentieth century, Mexico has maintained a clear position on international conflict: it has put negotiations before the use of force. The

military has never been an instrument of Mexican foreign policy.

Mexico and the United States have been on the same side in most international conflicts that to a greater or lesser extent have affected the northern part of this hemisphere: World Wars I and II; and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, when the Mexican government firmly resisted the very idea of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Mexico has never had an active international military policy, but we have always practiced very active, high profile diplomacy, favoring peace and stability in the international and regional arenas.

Strategic interest has been historically the most important concern for the United States in its relationship with Mexico. In this respect, for over eight decades there have been no situations in Mexico that could be considered threats to U.S. security or strategic interests.

With different perspectives, histories, traditions and cultural values,

our economies have always paralleled each other. Being neighbors has been both a challenge and an opportunity for Mexico. With an economy 20 times smaller than the U.S. economy and a 3,000 kilometer border, economic interaction is intense and of utmost importance to Mexico. In the past 60 years, 70 percent of our trade has been with the United States. Direct foreign investment has come in the same proportion from the United States. In times of Mexican financial or balance of payments crisis, the U.S. government has always played an active role, even before NAFTA. The relationship has been productive, constructive and functional for both parties.

Nevertheless, the institutional framework for solving differences and advancing in areas of cooperation has traditionally been weak. Cases like the 1985 assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico showed the weakness of institutional development: one unfortunate event jeopard-

\* General Consul of Mexico in San Diego.

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Presidents Clinton and Zedillo with their wives.

dized the whole bilateral relationship. With this perspective in mind, in the late 1980s, steps to strengthen the institutional bilateral relationship were taken, initiating a process which has advanced significantly in recent years.

#### FIVE PRIORITIES

Considering our history, common aims and a foreseeable future of increasing globalization that make us strengthen our plans for bilateral cooperation, authorities from both countries have been working toward a new age of understanding. That does not mean that all problems are going to be solved or simply vanish. In an intense and complex relationship

like the one between Mexico and the United States that is impossible. What it means is always having the right channels of communication and understanding to deal in the best manner with the great variety of issues on the binational agenda: the positive aspects of cooperation and the natural difficulties of wide ranging and increasing interaction.

On this agenda we have, from the Mexican perspective, five priorities: strengthening political dialogue and institutional development; consolidating the economic institutional framework to benefit both countries; reinforcing our mechanisms for cooperation against organized crime, especially drug trafficking; redefining U.S. immigration policy concerning Mexican nationals; and improving co-

operation on the broad agenda of border issues.

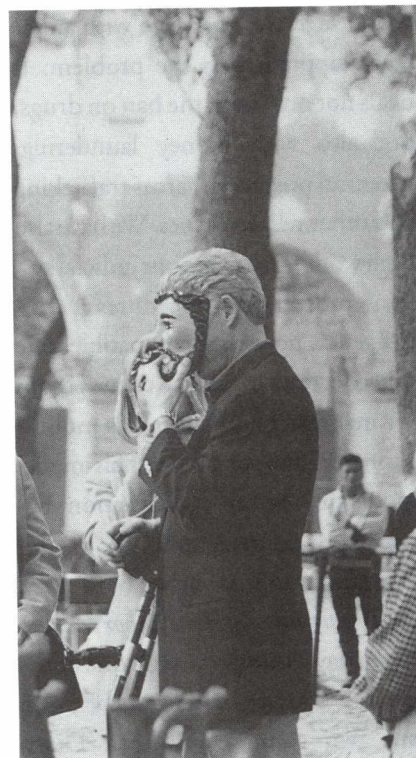
*Strengthening Political Dialogue.* Improving political dialogue is essential to reaching a new understanding. Last year, in May 1996, the 13th Meeting of the Binational Commission took place in Mexico City. Eight U.S. cabinet members attended. High ranking officials of both countries jointly discussed the different topics on the agenda in 16 groups that work year around to report and make major decisions in the annual meetings: finances, trade, migration, education, law enforcement, judicial cooperation, border issues, agriculture, fishing, science and technology and culture, among others. The first meeting that recently appointed Secretary of State Madelaine Albright had was with her Mexican counterpart from Mexico, José Angel Gurriá, the first week of February in Houston, Texas. In May, President Clinton visited Mexico. At the same time, the commissions and committees of the 16 high level binational groups work together regularly. The topics on the agenda are not likely to change; what has changed is the treatment and the attention both governments give to the different aspects of the relationship.

*Economic Interaction.* Economic interaction has been one of the most successful areas. The economic relationship was not a result of NAFTA: NAFTA simply made it clearer, easier and more efficient for the three countries. In 1990, bilateral trade between Mexico and the United States came to U.S.\$50 billion. In 1993, it reached U.S.\$82 billion. After three

years of NAFTA, trade between the two countries increased almost 60 percent, reaching U.S.\$140 billion in 1996. Despite Mexico's economic setbacks in 1994, exports from California to Mexico have been steadily increasing, totaling more than U.S.\$7 billion. Since 1994, 200,000 new jobs have been created in the U.S. manufacturing export sector, many of them related to exports to Mexico.

The good news comes not only from trade. As a result of the intense modernization process of the Mexican economy begun in 1995, many sectors traditionally reserved for Mexican governmental agencies or Mexican investors have been opened to foreign investors: railroads, ports, petrochemicals, airports, telephones, telecommunications and gas and electric utilities are all now open to foreign investors. We expect foreign investment of more than U.S.\$11 billion in 1997, mostly in production. This better atmosphere has also made it possible to increase bilateral trade by reviewing existing bans, such as ending the prohibition of avocado imports from Mexico or the tuna embargo, which we hope will finally be lifted in the first half of 1997. Other aspects of NAFTA are currently under discussion.

*Joint Cooperation Against Organized Crime.* One of the topics on the bilateral agenda that has caused great difficulties and distrust has been drug trafficking. The first heroin produced in Mexico was to supply the U.S. government for its medical needs on the European front during the World War II. In the 1960s a good percentage of the marihuana consumed in



President Clinton trying on a mask during his visit to Tlaxcala.

the United States came from Mexico. Nowadays, only 10 percent of the total U.S. marihuana consumption comes from Mexico. The most important problem started in the 1970s with the increase in U.S. cocaine consumption. Mexico does not produce cocaine; our country is only a stopover on the drug trail into the United States. In Mexico, consumption of hard drugs is not a major problem. Besides, most of the profits from the cocaine traffic do not go to Mexico: they go back to the producers or to U.S. dealers. The big business begins when the drugs arrive in the United States, and its value increases geometrically.

We do care very much about drug trafficking. It brings corruption with it, corruption of our people and our institutions. It brings crime and vio-

lence. Arms trafficking is closely related to the drug market, facilitating the possibility of expanding our domestic market for drug consumption. It brings tensions and conflict to our partnership with the United States. Drug trafficking is considered a matter of national security in Mexico and has the highest priority.

Some of the worst moments in the bilateral relationship have been related to this problem. This has led the Mexican government to seek a better framework for communication and cooperation with the United States. With full respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, we have made enormous achievements in institutional development for cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking. A high-level binational group for this purpose

was created two years ago with an integral approach to the problem. It deals not only with the ban on drugs, but also with money laundering, chemical precursors, arms trafficking and other related crimes. We have also been working to make our judicial systems, prosecuting procedures and intelligence networks compatible. We must decrease organized crime's room for maneuver and cut off its mobility on our common border. This implies more and better coordination between our agencies, as well as greater trust and commitment on both sides.

*Immigration and the Labor Market.* Nowadays, immigration is one of the greatest sources of tension between our two countries. In San Diego alone, in January 1997, 18 Mexicans died in their attempts to enter the United States without documents to work or join their families. In 1996 there were 38 cases of this kind: a total of 56 cases in 13 months.

When people are dying as a result of a policy, something must be wrong with that policy. These people are good people, peaceful, and excellent workers. They come to the United

States because they have ambitions; they want prosperity; they want to make better lives for their wives and children. Why do they come to this country? First, because of higher wages. Second and most important, because there is a need for them to fill jobs here.

Nobody knows the real figures on migrants. We all work with estimates. A recent article in the *Atlantic Monthly* says that in 1995 the contribution of all immigrants to the U.S. economy was U.S.\$150 billion and the social cost U.S.\$143 billion. The INS reports 275,000 newcomers every year; 54 percent stay illegally after entering legally; and the other 46 percent enter without documents. In this region in 1996, the Border Patrol effected 450,000 detentions. If we consider that they caught each person an average of 10 times, we are talking about 45,000 people who failed to enter the United States while perhaps an equal number succeeded.

The problem is that despite all the increases in manpower, equipment and high technology used by the INS and the Border Patrol in the

area, people are still trying to come even at the risk of their lives. The Mexican government is warning its citizens about these dangers. Efforts against smuggling people across the border have made unprecedented progress in Mexico. All these actions have not been enough. The continuous flow of undocumented immigration despite all the action taken seems to be a good indication that we are not taking the right approach to the problem. We are dealing with an economic phenomenon with very profound social impact. We are economic partners. We have NAFTA. This is, above all, a labor market question that involves Mexican workers and U.S. employers, Mexican and U.S. authorities. This is the great challenge that we will have to face in the near future.

*Border Issues.* The Tijuana-San Diego region is the world's busiest port of transit between two cities of different countries. Just at the port of entry of San Ysidro, more than 80,000 vehicles and 200,000 people cross in both directions every day. More than 2,500 trucks come through Otay port of entry daily. Exports from San Diego to Mexico amount to more than U.S.\$3 billion yearly. People from Baja California spend an estimated of U.S.\$2 billion every year in San Diego.

There are more than 530 maquiladora plants in this region. Seventy percent of all televisions sold in the United States come from this area. Tijuana has Mexico's lowest unemployment rate and is one of its most dynamic cities.

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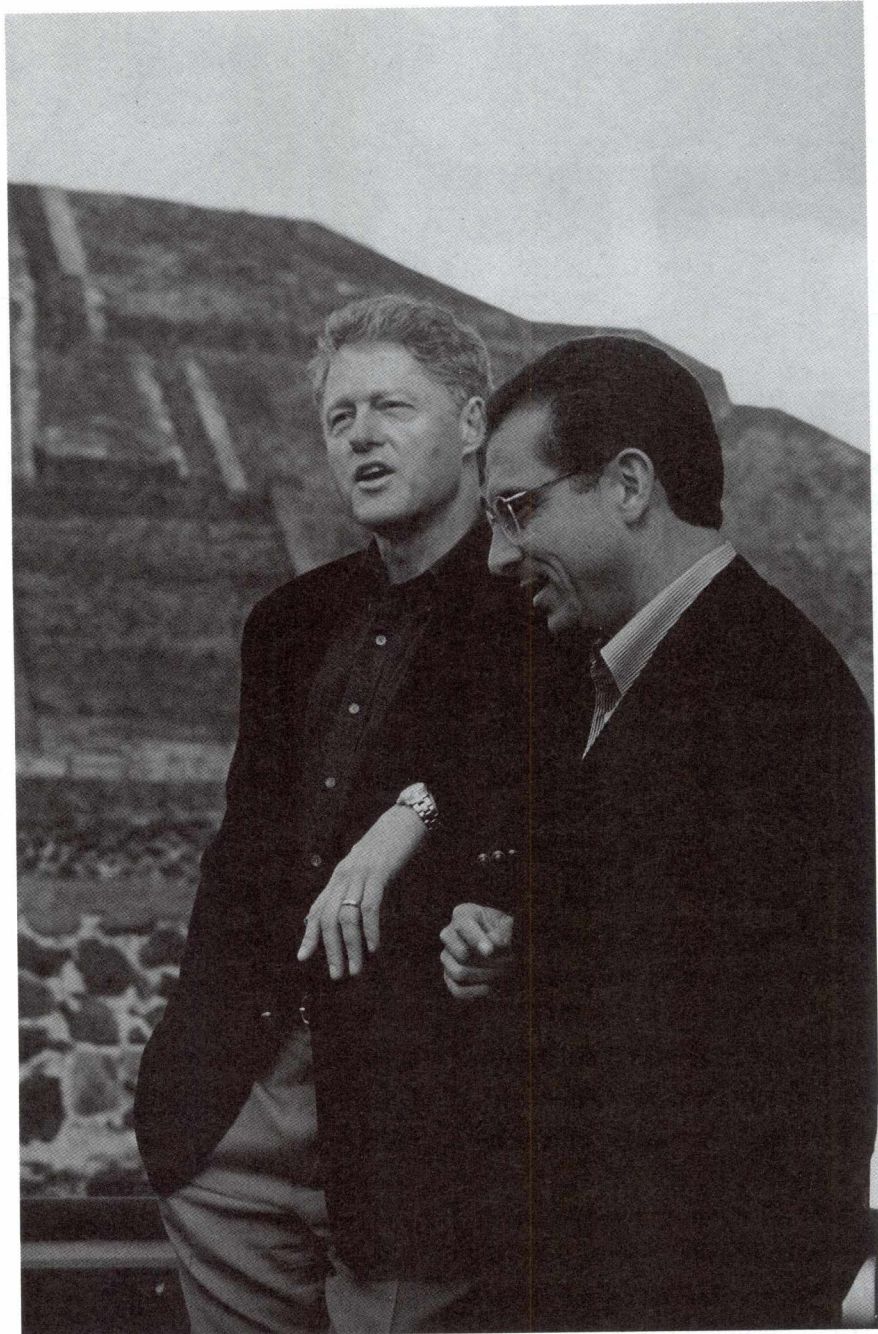
In this area we live every day in a microcosm of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Parallel to the increasing regional economic and social interaction, we have here one of the most critical points for drug trafficking, which is logical if we consider the intense movement across this border. Also, 40 percent of the undocumented workers from Mexico attempt to cross at this point, which is also understandable considering that the main labor market for them is California. This makes the San Diego-Tijuana region a typical case of a cooperation-conflict relationship, where the interests of the local, state and federal actors demand a high level of efficient institutional coordination between authorities from both countries.

Here, it is difficult to see the border as a political dividing line between the two countries. Economic, social and cultural exchange, natural resources, environment, transportation and infrastructure of different kinds are some of the areas of interaction that transcend the border. There is a clear contrast between this and the physical control of the border.

#### MAIN CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR 2000

We are very close to the end of the millennium. What do we expect for the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States?

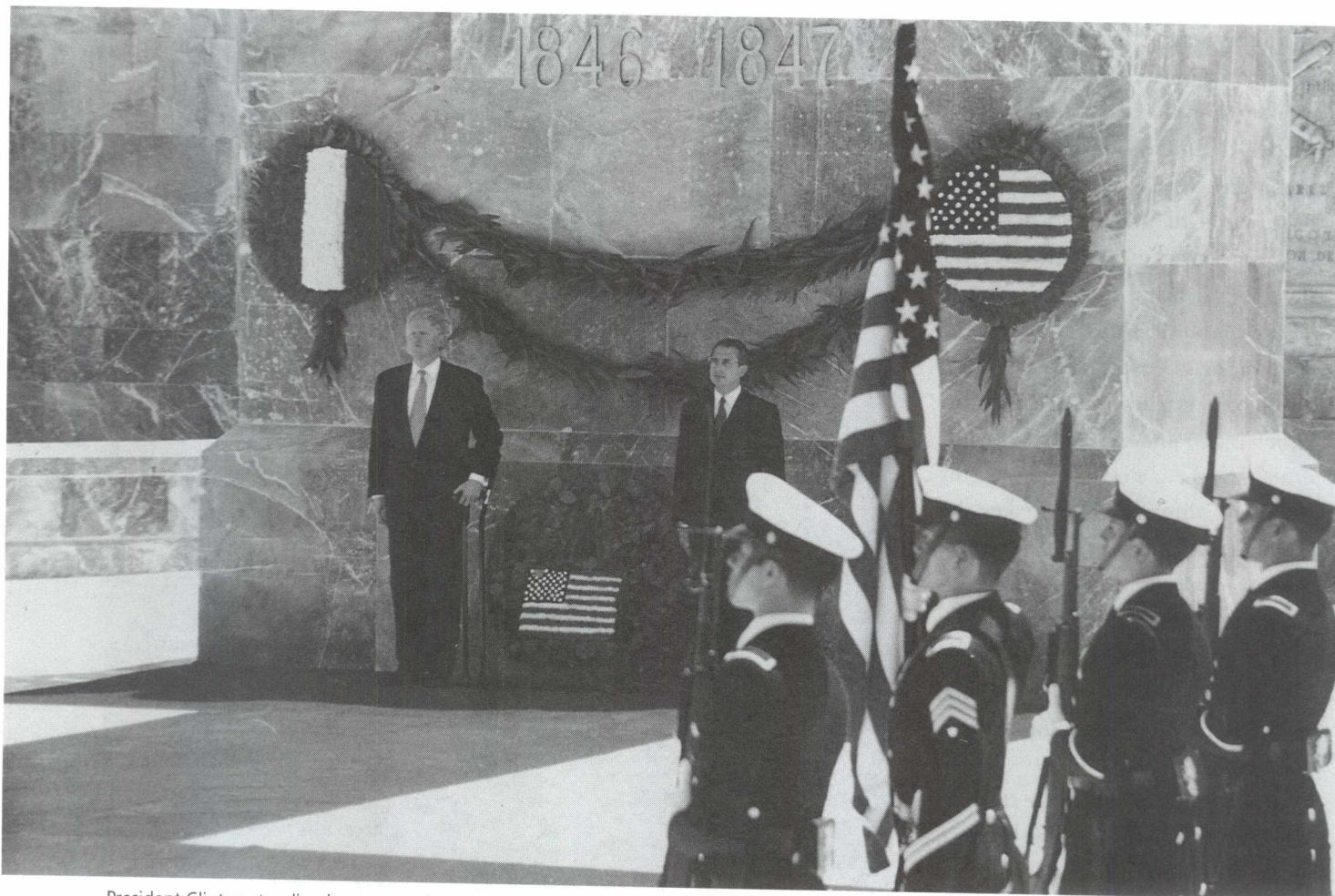
Economic interaction between the two countries is likely to grow more rapidly. That is good news for both



William Clinton and Ernesto Zedillo in Teotihuacan.

countries. Cooperation on border issues also offers a wide range of options and opportunities for both. It is a natural ground of common interest with challenges that have to be faced through constructive and extended cooperation.

Political dialogue is of utmost importance for the bilateral relationship as a whole. Relations between the executive branches of the two governments have improved significantly in recent times. Still, much work has yet to be done by members



President Clinton standing honor guard at Mexico's Monument to the Child Heroes who fell in battle during the 1847 U.S.-Mexican War.

of Congress and other politically influential actors on both sides to improve mutual knowledge and understanding.

For all long-term purposes, we have to handle two items on the agenda better: immigration and joint efforts against organized crime.

Cooperation in these two areas must improve. There is no use blaming others for our own problems. The biggest market for drugs in the world is in the United States. We have a common enemy. Distrust and mutual blame between partners only benefits our common enemies. Diplomatic pressure will not help us do

better. Both parties have to do their best and pool the results against organized crime.

With regard to immigration, chances are better. There is no common enemy in this realm: this is something that can be discussed with everyone involved. It is an economic challenge, not a criminal one. It has to be approached bilaterally. It is a social and economic issue involving the labor market and should not be handled as a police or criminal matter. We are economic partners and the labor market is an economic question. I am convinced that we can find better responses to this common concern. We have

NAFTA to help us discuss it constructively. We have to face the challenge together and find long-term solutions. It is a difficult task, but there does not seem to be a better way to do it.

Better understanding and a constructive relationship will depend very much on the ability on both sides and of most actors to find and strengthen avenues of cooperation, to consolidate institutional cooperation and to seek with creativity and imagination the mutual benefit for our communities, taking into consideration the enrichment derived from the cultural and historical diversity of our societies. ❧