

# Reviews

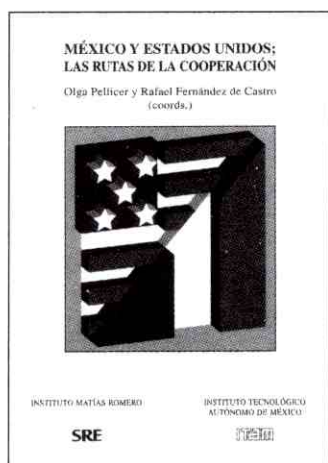
## **México y Estados Unidos, las rutas de la cooperación**

(Mexico and the United States. The Paths of Cooperation)

Olga Pellicer and Rafael Fernández de Castro, comps.

Instituto Matías Romero and Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, Nueva Epoca

Mexico City, 1998, 287 pp.



The very title of the book emphasizes cooperation, in contrast with the titles of other books on the same subject like *Distant Neighbors* or *Marriage of Convenience*, that emphasize a relationship between the United States and Mexico more akin to conflict and mutual ignorance.

This book is a collection of articles about the most important aspects of the relationship. First, Rafael Fernández de Castro compares bilateral relations in the 1980s and the 1990s, characterizing them as asymmetrical and complex, marked by the great many participating actors. According to Fernández, the agenda includes economic-trade questions, structural issues (migration and drug trafficking), international policy and the so-called informal agenda (human rights and democracy). He constructs a model that takes into account all these elements and

concludes that relations have improved. The link between both executives has become more pragmatic in order to solve common problems. Trade has moved out of chaos to the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Foreign policy has been transformed, going from the confrontation over the Contadora Group to a common peace proposal for El Salvador. Relations regarding drug trafficking and migration have advanced, particularly once they became institutionalized. And, undoubtedly, issues around democracy and human rights will become more important in the near future.

Writing on migratory policy, Francisco Alba goes into how the Mexican government went from being totally bereft of policy, to having one oriented toward dialogue and cooperation. This has made it possible to limit conflicts. The idea is to arrive at a “mutually agreed-upon regimen for conflict resolution” (p. 78). In Alba’s view, paradoxically, NAFTA contradicts labor liberalization and the mobility of individuals. Therefore, he proposes a broader discussion about regional integration, so that migration can be analyzed in the context of a regional economy. He also supports dialogue and cooperation despite the apparent obstacle of migratory policies being the result of each state’s sovereign decisions.

In his article, Luis Herrera Lasso deals with border relations. Taking into consideration the more than 300 million annual crossings of the 3000 kilometer border, in his opinion it is only recently, in the 1990s, that the governments of the United States and Mexico have attempted “to forge a permanent institutional framework that would allow them to establish a dialogue and find solutions to problems that require bilateral cooperation” (p. 90). He thinks we must aspire to a border planned and managed by both governments, and not a system of control that attempts to isolate each government’s policy from the other.

It falls to Miguel Ruiz Cabañas to deal with the problem of drug trafficking. According to his analysis, the crises in bilateral relations with regard to this issue have been more linked to U.S. domestic factors than to a real reduction of illicit drug dealing.

If the economy is doing well, drugs become an attractive election issue. It is this factor, external to the relations themselves, that makes solutions difficult to find. Countering this, the author lays out all the advances in institutionalization in an extremely difficult area, but then states that things have not been as successful as with other topics on the agenda. Rather pessimistically, he underlines that institutionalization has not resolved problems of unilateral actions on the part of the U.S. government nor brought about the trust needed for cooperation.

Sidney Weintraub writes about trade and investment between the United States and Mexico, pointing to a great change. During the Cold War, the United States was only concerned with containment of the Soviet Union, while for Mexico this was not important. Since NAFTA, a much more solid economic relationship has been established that requires cooperation and since then, institutional relations have been vigorously bolstered.

Undoubtedly, most countries in the world are concerned about migration, although for different reasons. Rodolfo Tuirán proposes that a “bilateral focus” is needed to appraise the problem “within the broader framework of development, asymmetry and the two countries’ increasing economic integration” (p. 159). He states that the political will to agree on solutions does exist and that, therefore, progress has been made. Tuirán offers us an extensive, profound characterization of Mexican migrants to the United States, at the same time that he enumerates the main causes for their move. Based on projections, he concludes that migration will continue to be constant, and that therefore it is recommendable that both parties maintain a dialogue to find integral, useful solutions.

Mexican communities abroad are of great importance, both in the United States and in Mexico. Carlos Gutiérrez and María Esther Schumacher describe the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad, a unique program in which a country with a less powerful economy aids those who voluntarily emigrated to a wealthier country. This is obviously due to the Mexican government recognition of its own responsibility to these emigrants. In order to raise that community’s standard of living, the program includes strategies for education, community organization, sports, health, cultural, and business matters and the dissemination of information, etc.

To situate Mexico-U.S. relations in a historical context, Jesús Velasco Márquez tells us about our two countries’ common history. Using as a starting point Mexico’s asymmetrical

relationship with the United States with its many participants, Velasco describes how it has changed over time from being allies to enemies; from partners of convenience during the nineteenth century to a period of confrontation at the beginning of this century, and later how it went back to cooperation for convenience’s sake. During World War II, both basically shared common interests at a government level, but the public of both countries had a negative perception of each other. During the Cold War, Mexico designed a foreign policy independent of the United States. By the 1960s the special relationship with Mexico on economic matters had come to an end and divergences and confrontations became more and more acute during the Echeverría administration. This, together with domestic discontent in the business community would lead Mexico to devalue the peso in 1976. During the 1980s, the foundations of a new kind of relationship began to be laid. When Mexico’s economy was reorganized, NAFTA was signed and became “the keystone of relations with the United States and of its entire foreign policy” (p. 241).

In a truly original, refreshing chapter, Alfonso Alfaro talks about the “phantoms” in bilateral relations. He dedicates his article to the different political actors’ perceptions, asking an intelligent question: What happens when a society that includes several civilizations but tries to allow a cultural space to emerge among them (Mexico) meets up with another society organized around a single civilization, but within which different cultural identities are in effervescence (the United States)? Ideals, dreams, values, prejudices, senses of time and customs interweave to produce a very complex set of relations between these two countries. In the author’s opinion, it may be through culture that solutions to both societies’ problems can be found.

Undoubtedly, this book is fundamental for understanding relations between Mexico and the United States. As devil’s advocate, I would say that I would like to have read a theoretical article that could have given more meaning to the separate analyses presented here. It is of note that Jesús Velasco’s excellent historical article is placed almost at the end of the book, when at the beginning it would have helped in situating the more specific articles. However, these are minor points that in no way diminish the book’s academic value. **MM**

*Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla*  
**Director of CISAN**