The Security and Prosperity Partnership in North America Challenges for a Successful Agenda

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Jim Young/Reuters

From left to right: U.S. Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff, Canada's Minister of Public Safety Anne McLellan and Mexico's Secretrary of the Interior Carlos Abascal, got together to discuss security matters.

Prosperity, Security and North America

The economic integration of North America has deepened in the last 25 years as never before. NAFTA, despite its inadequacies, cemented a process that goes beyond traditional economic trade models by including other social, political, environmental and cultural elements. Now, after 9/11, the emerging policies of U.S. homeland security will require important adjustments in the interaction of the United States with Mexico and Canada. Security policies have shifted a paradigm on the format of interaction among the three countries including logistics, transportation, persons crossing borders, biohazard threats, food safety and the synchronization of industries in more integrated ways. The challenges, especially along the border, illustrate that the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico and Canada is entering a new stage of complex interdependence. To ensure proper implementation, the three countries will need to make significant structural adjustments focusing on a) collective prosperity, b) the inclusion of actors at the local level, and c) strengthening public opinion.

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Over time relationships among countries change based on domestic politics. The relationship between the United States and its neighbors has deepened in the last 25 years and periodically adjusts to priorities and ideological influences in each country. The American binational agenda, with both Mexico and Canada, is the best example of a model of complex interdependent international relations including such topics as environment, migration, trade, transportation, investment, energy, regional politics, communications and law enforcement, among others. For the United States government nothing could be more complex and demanding than managing the operational relationship with Mexico and Canada.

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The continuing interdependence of the three countries is clearly shown by trade volumes, vehicle traffic and people crossing the U.S. border. According to the U.S. Trade Authority, the United States' two main trade partners are Canada and Mexico, representing a total inter-trade volume of U.S.$713 billion in 2004, or roughly U.S.$2 billion a day.[1] Yet, for both Mexico and Canada, the United States is their main export destination. Similarly, no other international border has the volume of traffic that Canada and Mexico have to the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the number of crossings has become an operational hardship with 11.5 million incoming trucks, more than 125 million passenger vehicles and more than 325 million people crossing U.S. borders.[2]

While the broad national context has caught the three governments' attention, U.S. border area conditions are more demanding. Official statistics of the three countries indicate that the population concentration on both U.S. borders represent a challenge now and in the future. A little over 50 million people live along the northern border. Nearly 90 percent of all Canadians (27 million) live within 100 miles of the border with the U.S., while almost a tenth of the total U.S. population lives on the U.S. border side. Along the southern border almost 14 million people live in cities and municipalities on the U.S.-Mexico border, but estimates indicate that by 2010 population there will increase to 20 million.[3] People living near U.S. borders share economies, natural resources, jobs and services, imposing serious security concerns for the neighbors on both sides.

The citizens of Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. share not only a space but a system, and both frame their daily lives. The preservation and enhancement of these systems are necessary now and in the coming years. These are the challenges facing the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) signed by the leaders of Canada, Mexico and the United States in Texas, last March 2005.[4] The main objective of the partnership is to maintain and increase the economic vitality achieved by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to ensure that citizens of all three countries live in a secure and economically viable environment.

THE REAL CHALLENGES OF THE SPP

The intensity of interaction among the three countries is undeniable and requires the full attention of local, state and national governments. However, a new element has been added to the complex matrix of interactions: national security. Now, after 9/11, the model of cooperation and interaction is being recalibrated by the addition of U.S. national security components. These new factors will add unexpected new challenges to the domestic policies of Mexico and Canada.

This concept of national security needs to be considered as a permanent variable for the viability of the North American regional model. The depth and breadth of Mexico and Canada's economic interdependence with the U.S. and vice versa now need to factor in an advanced security framework, not only to continue evolving but to ensure that the benefits are shared by all. The ultimate objective of a trinational relationship is to ensure the continuity of sustainable coexistence, with a commitment that includes innovative approaches and flexible perspectives.

With this complex matrix, North American nations acknowledge the presence and importance of three factors: the role and weight of their domestic agendas, the dynamics of local needs and the relevance of working on international agreements. At any given time, the three factors have a different influence on policy making. In fact, policies directed at a country or a border sharing area may respond to the three factors at a particular moment while the other country may respond to one or two. The difficulty, now and in the future, is to ensure that those policies are compatible with the other neighbor's remedies.

First of all, the number one challenge of the SPP is to increase the collective prosperity of the citizens of North America. Also, the U.S. needs to acknowledge that the trilateral relationship goes beyond just economic and trade purposes. The well-being and prosperity of citizens in the three countries are essential. A second challenge is to ensure the participation of state and local actors in the process to define the best models of cooperation. A last challenge as outlined at the beginning of this article is to increase the public's understanding of the process of creating a set of trinational policies that either directly or indirectly affect all of us.

NAFTA, after 12 years and despite its shortcomings, has proved to be successful in aggregate terms. Without a doubt, in each country some sectors of the economy and their workers were affected negatively by the trade regulations. For the SPP to be successful it must offer a clear view of how prosperity is going to be achieved and how the benefits will be shared. To require more sacrifices from workers and citizens in general will bring only contradictions and a collective rejection that will affect the future of the partnership itself. The current economic conditions, especially in the U.S., are not conducive to gaining immediate support for a set of policies to enhance North American well being.

One example is General Motors CEO Rick Wagoner's announcement of the elimination of 30,000 jobs and the closure of nine auto assembly plants in North America. The news was no surprise for Michigan residents, where three plants will be closed. Canada lost one, but interestingly, Mexican plants remained intact. Yet, the impact for other plants in North America is unclear.[5] And, the consequences of Delphi's bankruptcy are not clear enough to signal how they will affect the company that employs the most workers in Mexico. According to analysts, the closings are the result of production cost adjustments, more competitive prices from European and Asian manufacturers and the increasing cost of GM pensions. Ford and Chrysler are in similar straits, showing that the North American auto industry is in a severe economic crisis.

One unintended consequence of the downturns in economic conditions is a tendency to blame others for the causes. Mexico will be a scapegoat for the process. Two conditions seem to fuel these perceptions. One is that outsourcing of investments and relocation of companies to Mexico has continued for most of 2005, and the other is the belief that Mexico designs policies to steal jobs and investment from the U.S.

The second challenge is to give local needs a prominent role based on the new regulations imposed by U.S. homeland security. The North American national governments need to recognize that local municipalities and border states act as a point of interaction every day and that these jurisdictions will be interacting in the years to come. The sooner they participate, the better it will be for the success of the SPP. Also, local capacity to respond to logistical and security demands will require investments and resources that need to be allocated by central governments.

The border areas are a space for cooperation and conflict and under the SPP, they need to play a prominent role. Interaction is constant, systematic and intrusive. Local communities permanently interact, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Events on one side have an immediate effect on the other, and if there is a crisis, local authorities will be the first to respond. Ottawa, Washington, and Mexico City will respond but after measures have already been taken locally.

The public is a required actor in the security and prosperity partnership. The careful cultivation of public opinion must be incorporated at two levels: the transparency and access to information required for any policy design and proposals accountable and clear for all. Without the effective participation of those who are most likely to be affected, such as border residents and their respective local governments, the model is likely to fail. Moreover, the press and news media need to be provided with timely briefings and access to information so readers and viewers form a collective public opinion that understands the purposes of the new policies.

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Each country's government needs to work on each other's public opinion; this is one of the goals of public diplomacy. By the end of 2005, given the deteriorating public opinion in the U.S., it is clear that Mexico needs it the most. The generalized negative opinion of Mexico is sooner or later going to erode the small but important support the current administration has to propose significant changes in the relationship. While the public image of a vibrant and

integrated North America is the responsibility of each country within its own borders, there is little doubt that they need to lobby in each other's countries, efficiently and rapidly. Canada has done it very successfully and it is time for Mexico to do the same.[6]

PERCEPTIONS TURN INTO POLITICAL ACTION

A couple of examples illustrate the importance of working on perceptions and building positive public opinion. One is a political variable that is galvanizing Americans regardless of their origins, income, religion, education or party affiliation: undocumented immigration. As never before, there is now a consensus to deter and control immigration not only in the Southwest but in all areas of the country. Areas that traditionally have low migrant populations, like the lower Midwest and the Grand Lakes region, began to be polarized about the divergent policies to control migration. The unintended consequences of this process have caused an openly negative attitude toward migrants and Mexico. For racists, this is a timely opportunity to express their sentiments against Mexican workers; for ethno-centrists this offers another excuse for Mexico bashing. Little or nothing is being said about the migrants' contributions to the U.S. economy and to the society in general.

The situation is becoming so agitated that on November 28, 2005 in Tucson, Arizona, President Bush offered a first strong message against undocumented immigration. In front of numerous law enforcement agents and without mentioning Mexico, the message was loud and clear: the border is unsecured. The presidential message recommends more border patrol agents, more screenings, more advanced technology and harsher penalties for violators. Mr. Bush's basic massage was, "Our responsibility is clear, we are going to protect the border." By late evening all major TV and cable news shows (CNN, FOX, ABC, CBS and NBC) covered the presidential speech and, even the traditionally neutral commentators of public television (PBS) struck out against Mexico and its uncontrolled invasion of the U.S.

By Tuesday, the national press, like *The New York Times,* wrote that the president was trying to solve a problem with band-aids, giving a speech to appease the radical right wing of his party. Major representatives of immigration centers have divergent opinions about the proposal outlined by Mr. Bush, some supporting the initiatives and others criticizing them. The two most contested proposals are the creation of the temporary guest-worker program and the amnesty for those who are already illegally in the U.S.[7] The measures attempt to solve a domestic problem which affects interdependent labor markets, international and foreign affairs, and unless there is a serious understanding of the factors of attraction, the polarization of public opinion and Mexico and immigrant bashing will continue.[8]

Added to the problem of undocumented migration, the continuing growth of violence and drug wars in border towns, especially in Nuevo Laredo and Tijuana, has caused an image of chaos and lawlessness in Mexico. Notions of illegality, corruption, violence and lack of rule of law are extended to all of Mexico and its citizens. Under these conditions, the challenge for Mexican public diplomacy is to build a less hostile American public opinion. This is no easy task when most of these perceptions are generally correct.

Conservative commentators, not news anchors, on CNN and Fox News have openly developed a confrontational negative attitude toward Mexico. These biased, uninformed, unprofessional commentaries are based on two things: undocumented immigration and the current negative economic conditions in the U.S., which are easy to exploit in the present economic and political environment. The formula is simple: blame the weak and the newcomer for all the problems the country is facing.

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Undocumented immigration and terrorism are connected in two ways: the perceived violation of domestic laws (illegal entry), and the potential for terrorists to use the networks of drug traffickers and migrant smugglers. Part of the fear of losing control of the border is the result of the general attitude that Americans have expressed about their security. Every public opinion survey shows that Americans feel unsafe and have little or no confidence in what their government does to protect them. While most Americans placed direct responsibility on their own government for the capacity to avoid another attack, most analysts acknowledge

that security policies require the collaboration of their northern and southern neighbors. Security measures, especially to protect the border, air space and sea areas, are operationally linked to Canada and Mexico.

It is not too difficult to make the case for security in the new security and prosperity partnership with Mexico and Canada. For instance, this past October 2005, a CBS News poll showed that many Americans (37 percent) have very little or no confidence in the U.S. government to protect its citizens from future terrorist attacks.[9] When the questions focus on prevention, polls show higher numbers of Americans (60 percent) who have doubts about the capacity of the U.S. government to prevent any further attacks.[10] Clearly, prevention measures require the participation of neighbors and allies.

Canada's institutional and legal relationships with the U.S. may provide Mexico with some practical approaches on how common problems can be solved.

The general perception of readiness was gloomy on the last anniversary of September 11. When Americans are offered a variety of potential risks, their attitude is more negative. In a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll conducted in September 2005, respondents were asked if they thought that the U.S. was adequately prepared for a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack and 75 percent said no; only 19 percent said yes, and only 6 percent were unsure.[11] The question addresses an issue that has important repercussions for Mexico and Canada. Many potential U.S. targets and shared natural resources (lakes and rivers) are located near the borders with a significant non-U.S. population at risk.

The new elements of homeland security, however, remind U.S. policy makers that the security of U.S. borders cannot be accomplished without the cooperation of Mexico and Canada. While this adds new realism to the complex interdependent model of North America, public opinion still considers that the U.S. can do it alone. New enforcement and security measures depend not only on the effective operation of U.S. government agencies but on how well the exchange of information and rapid collaboration with Canadian and Mexican agencies takes place in a trusted and reliable environment.

Strategies for Successful Cooperation under the SPP

Examples of cooperation between the U.S. and Canada have been successful and need to be replicated for the SPP, especially by Mexico. One of the important lessons is that many regional problems are solved locally.

For instance, in 1955, the signing of the Great Lakes Basin Compact created several programs that protect and regulate the use of water in the Great Lakes. Eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces are members of the charter that is managed bi-nationally to protect, preserve and regulate the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Basin. Representatives are nominated by the governors or premiers and their mandate is to serve their respective communities in administering water resources.

Canadian-American cooperation in the Great Lakes is not always expedient and trouble free. Policy design and legislation are not always easily accepted by the other nation. But by empowering local authorities, any dispute is examined collectively to the benefit of all involved.

In addition, Canadian and American states, provinces and border cities also engage in the creation of mutual security nodes. For instance, in April 2003, the governor of New York, George Pataki, and the premier of Ontario, Ernie Eves, announced the signing of an agreement to seek expeditious mechanisms for customs controls in which both the state and the province actively assume security responsibilities.[12] And, even with these examples, policy makers in both countries recognize that attitudes and perceptions the societies have of each other are dynamic, particularly in the border area, and these have an impact on policy priorities. Learning about each other is one of the challenges.

One important actor in building public opinion is the news media. The U.S. border press pays a fair amount of attention to border and security issues; yet, the national influential media only covers binational issues when there is a conflict. The media usually shapes our notions of each other, and the Mexican newspapers spend more time on news related to the U.S. than vice versa. The U.S. media coverage of Mexico comes in sensationalist waves rather than informing views and perspectives that help the public to understand issues. Most national news published relates to drugs, immigration, natural disasters and occasional notes on NAFTA arbitration panels.

In seeking a North American agenda for prosperity and security for the border region, alternatives should start with a framework that includes the recognition that the relationship of the U.S. and its neighbors is a typical example of complex interdependence. Problems exist not only at the local and regional level but also at the transnational level. Each national congress and administration needs to recognize that actions must be taken jointly with a genuine commitment to sustainable so-lutions. Now that security has been added, the solutions need to maintain the economic model.

Besides national security, the U.S. needs to address the topics of sharing natural resources, migration, trade, energy and, ultimately, development with both neighbors as common problems. Security is a matter of concern not only for the United States; proximity makes it an issue for both neighbors. For the deepening of interaction within North America the issue is that economic interests are as important as local political concerns. How each society and its culture will emerge from this rearrangement of interests is to be seen. However, regardless of the format adopted, a new regional form of integration is being forged.[13]

While economic interdependence continues to grow there are concerns about cooperation and sovereignty. Yet, of the three countries, Mexico will struggle more due to asymmetric differences, ideological conditions and governmental capacity. The best example for Mexico, though, is to examine the Canadian experience rich in dealing and working with the U.S. Mexico needs to scrutinize Canada's institutional and legal relationships with the U.S. which may provide some practical approaches on how common problems can be solved by the two countries, particularly in maintaining bi-national organizations, fostering local agencies' input in solving common problems, educating populations on common issues and promoting accountability and access to information. This is an adjustment not new to developing countries; Spain implemented and has maintained major structural reforms in order to join the European Union.

For North America the opportunity to build long-lasting cooperation models is here. Security among nations is forged on their complementary interests, purposes and needs. An active cooperative model implies a common understanding of the costs, risks, burdens and rewards. Prosperity and security are possible if they are built in a model that includes elements of reciprocity, reliability and high degrees of predictability. These elements require a policy paradigm shift in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, and while the risks are great, the rewards will be greater. VM

NOTES

[1] United States International Trade Authority and U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Trade Statistics (Washington, D.C., 2005).

[2] United States Department of Transportation, Transportation Reports (Washington, D.C., 2004).

[3] Statistics Canada, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; and *Censo General de Población* (Mexico City: INEGI, 2000).

[4] Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, *Trilingual Report to Leaders,* June 27, 2005.

[5] "GM Slashing 30,000 Jobs and Closing Plants," *Associated Press,* November 21, 2005.

[6] The 105th American Assembly, *Renewing the U.S.-Canada Relationship* (Canadian Institute of International Affairs/Canada Institute/Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars/American Assembly/Columbia University, February 2005).

[7] Nina Bernstein, "Across U.S. Bush's Plan Finds People Deeply Split," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2005, p. A16.

[8] Richard W. Stevenson, "President Renews his Campaign to Overhaul Policies on Immigration," *The New York Times*, November 29, 2005, p. A16.

[9] CBS News Poll, October 3-5, 2005 (808 adults surveyed nationwide).

[10] ABC News/*Washington Post* poll. September 8-11, 2005 (1,201 adults surveyed nationwide. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch).

[11] NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted by the polling organizations of Peter Hart (D) and Bill McInturff (R). September 9-12, 2005 (500 adults surveyed nationwide).

[12] Office of the Premier Press Release, "Ontario-New York Security and Trade Relationship Focus of Meeting between Governor Pataki and Premier Eves," April 9, 2003.

[13] Manuel Chávez Márquez, "Dinámicas de Integración y Seguridad. Población, Desarrollo y Recursos Naturales en las Políticas Públicas de México-Estados Unidos," *Población, Agua y Desarrollo en la Frontera México-Estados Unidos*, Alfonso Cortés, Scott Whiteford and Manuel Chávez, comps. (Tijuana: Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 2005).