

Interview with Carlos Pascual, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico¹

Leonardo Curzio*

LEONARDO CURZIO: Mr. Ambassador, let me begin the conversation mentioning the death of Arturo Beltrán Leyva, one of the drug kingpins most wanted by U.S. authorities. What is your evaluation of this?

CARLOS PASCUAL: First, I must congratulate the government of Mexico, the SEMAR [Mexico's Ministry of the Navy] teams, for this operation. They were very professional, protecting civilians as they carried out the operation effectively, even though they were in a highly populated area. I want to acknowledge the efforts made to train these forces because they're really getting results. This is a very important step because it sends the kingpins the message that they're not going to be able to proceed with impunity, that they'll pay a price for everything they do—and it may turn out to be their lives—and that this fight is going to continue on all fronts.

LC: Is cooperation, the principle of co-responsibility, which is the basis for the Mérida Initiative, the right thing to do? Are we on the right road?

CP: I think so. The efforts of the last six months should be especially highlighted, as cooperation has sped up in intelligence matters and creating trustworthy control groups. In addition, we've made getting the equipment to Mexico much more expeditious. Our response capability has increased on both sides of the border, and this can be seen in the way the Mexican government is now implementing operations.



United States Ambassador to Mexico Carlos Pascual.

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I have to emphasize that these operations always happen on the Mexican side; the United States is not carrying out operations in its territory. The credit for these actions, then, all goes to Mexico; but the success stems from the joint effort. Contributing to Mexico's having this response capability has really been a great pleasure for us.

LC: Are the different security agencies' teams—both of the Mexicans and the Americans—fully conscious of being

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on the same side? That is, has the trust and sense of co-responsibility penetrated all spheres?

CP: I think so. One fundamental thing is that this work began with the relationship between the two presidents. If that hadn't been positive, it couldn't have spread to the other spheres. That is, the trust between them has pushed the rest of the bureaucracies and agencies to work in this same vein. When we have political meetings, they're in a climate of absolute trust, and that positively impacts the agencies' work, both internally and with each other. What we want is for them to work together as much as possible: sharing information, experiences, lessons, techniques for functioning more effectively. All that contributes to generating the trust that will strengthen both governments' capabilities.

LC: Cooperation on issues of intelligence and sharing tactical, operational and even strategic information are fundamental for two governments that recognize drug trafficking as a threat to their own security. What is your view of the technological development Mexico has achieved, for example, with the Mexico Platform? That is, does its having these technological capabilities improve its operational relationship with U.S. agencies?

CP: The investments on the Mexican side have brought excellent results. It's really been a pleasure for us working with you. We've supported the Federal Police in its creation of the Mexico Platform, but the main investment has clearly been Mexican. This is a good example of the kind of cooperation that exists, because for every dollar we've spent, Mexico is investing five or six times that amount. And that is as it should be because Mexico is the center of operations. What we're also trying to do is to look toward strategic areas where we can invest, to see if we can bring in tailor-made technology or if we can create a model that can be reproduced elsewhere. We've helped consolidate the program with certain technologies, but also with training to support the education of the Mexican forces. Now we're seeing how this model

can be reproduced in training the police forces in the states and municipalities.

LC: In the beginning, the Felipe Calderón administration started up an aggressive agenda of extraditions to the United States. I suppose this is an important message to the drug traffickers that the border will not harbor them with impunity. How has this progressed?

CP: Well, in 2009, Mexico extradited more than 105 individuals to the United States, a higher number than in any other year. This indicates, first off, that our joint work is getting results in capturing criminals, and that we have the capability of ensuring they be tried in the United States. Secondly, what it also highlights is that there is greater understanding between the two governments about how to process the extraditions so that the main objective is putting criminals in jail. The issue is not whether they're in Mexico or in the United States; the issue is who has the best case prepared to be able to try them and see the whole trial through to a positive outcome.

LC: Some say that with the Mérida Initiative, Mexico and the United States are applying all the capability of the state to deal with these criminals and that the Beltrán Leyva case is proof of that. But they also say that we've neglected—to use the military term—the addictions front; that there has been a failure to cut demand. What's your opinion, Mr. Ambassador?

CP: We're dealing with this challenge on both sides of the border. The drug trade that began in Mexico doesn't only consist of the purchase and sale of these goods, but entails consumption. Therefore, the United States has had to face this challenge in an unprecedented way, which has been possible because of the big change represented by President Barack Obama and Secretary Hillary Clinton coming to office. Presidential advisor Gil Kerlikowske has come to Mexico several times and some of these visits have been to deal specifically with this issue.

We have to look at drug addiction in a totally different way. We have to emphasize prevention, treatment, working inside jails. When these people leave prison, we have to make sure they have opportunities to develop, access to a job. If not, they can fall back into addiction. And that's a task that has to be taken up all over the country, focusing on communities

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where we’ve found that work has to be intensified. In Mexico, the same thing is being attempted: establishing links between Mexican and U.S. addiction treatment centers, exchanging experiences and offering support to Mexican centers. However, there’s still a lot to be done against this threat.

LC: There’s one issue that is sometimes discussed in the U.S. Congress because some Democratic legislators and NGOs are concerned about human rights. In one of his most memorable speeches, when talking about the fight against terrorism, President Barack Obama said the United States could not have the slightest doubt, that one of its fundamental values as a republic is respect for human rights and that this is not incompatible with improving security levels. Do you think that in Mexico we’ve understood that that equation has to be simultaneous, that is, that guaranteeing security must not involve violating human rights?

CP: I’m glad you touched on this issue, Leonardo, because it’s absolutely fundamental. I think that every country must analyze its behavior, and we’ve already done that in the United States. That’s why on his first day in office, President Barack Obama said we would close the base at Guantánamo.

LC: Some of the prisoners are already being moved to Illinois.

CP: Yes. And we’ve committed ourselves once again to complying with the Geneva Conventions and all the conventions against torture because these aren’t issues you can play around with. They have to be analyzed and very strict measures have to be implemented. I think it’s important to give new impetus to the human rights issue to assure the population that the fight against drug traffickers and crime does not imply sacrificing human rights. We’re prepared to support our Mexican colleagues on this point, exchanging knowledge with human rights groups about how to create systems that will make it possible to guarantee transparency and accountability. In the courts and on an international level there are mechanisms for dealing with specific cases to ensure compliance.

We would like to maintain the possibility of working with those systems and sharing the experience. We’re talking with our colleagues in the government about this.

LC: In Latin America, civilian-military relations have not always gone well; there are countries where they are very fragmented. Mexico may be an exceptional case, since they function, even surprisingly well. Surveys rate the army as one of the most trusted institutions, despite the fact that right now it’s facing a very complex task in spearheading the fight against drug trafficking. You have told us on several occasions—and we would like you to explain— what you mean when you say the army should not be left alone.

CP: Absolutely. I believe the fight against drug traffickers and organized crime requires the efforts of an entire country, and the army is taking on the role that has been demanded of it, even if it’s something it doesn’t want to do. In Tijuana, we can see how the army acts when it is called in to fight criminals, even drug traffickers: they move out accompanied by a unit of city police, which is who has the authority to cordon off the area and gather and present the evidence to the judicial system. On the other hand, it’s absolutely necessary for the population to have the confidence to be able to make accusations against criminals. We have to combine the army’s capabilities with those of police forces, who have the legal authority to put together civil cases. You have to work with prosecutors, but also with civil society, because all of these parties are essential to success in this fight.

LC: Security very often takes up a good part of the time we dedicate to analyzing Mexico-U.S. relations. However, the importance of our relationship goes beyond this issue; sometimes we forget that we’re trade partners, that 80 percent of Mexican trade is with the United States and that there’s a very tightly-woven human, entrepreneurial fabric that joins the two countries. What’s your view of the state of relations in this area? Was 2009 really a horrific year for the two economies?

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CP: I think we’ve touched bottom in the recession, and now we’re beginning to grow. This, on the U.S. side especially, will help generate the demand that will give impetus to both economies. That’s not the only thing I can say about it, but it’s basic to the answer. The crisis of the last 18 months has not affected only Mexico and the United States, but the entire world. We hadn’t gone through a recession like this in more than 100 years, and that’s why both presidents’ efforts have concentrated on getting the economies back on their feet to then focus investments appropriately to begin a growth process. And now we have to look at another problem associated with all these investments: we have to observe fiscal policy to guarantee fiscal responsibility, in order to ensure that we haven’t generated so much debt that we can’t finance future projects.

LC: And to avoid making new generations pay the price. At the Trilateral Meeting, which Stephen Harper also attended, I noticed that great emphasis was placed on issues of energy and the environment.

CP: Let me round out two ideas before moving on to that point. Now that we’ve hit the bottom of the recession, it’s absolutely necessary to start to grow. Both countries have to have a strategy for coordinating policies, increasing competitiveness—and here, I’m talking about the competitiveness of both countries and North America as a whole, in the framework of a globalized economy. Both countries need to have the capacity, for example, of selling an automobile, since in the United States, we can’t sell a car *competitively* if Mexico and the United States aren’t integrated.

LC: In the big struggle for global competitiveness, are Mexico and the United States in the same boat, Mr. Ambassador?

CP: Absolutely. It’s China, India and Europe who are competing with us. We’re working in such a way that the capabilities we achieve between the two countries will allow us

to produce better quality and at a lower price than any other individual nation.

LC: However, we need jobs in the region...

CP: That’s right, and we’re creating jobs in the region. We have to look at the whole picture, because if we just look at any single sector, it could be argued that integration and cooperation have caused job losses in the United States or in Mexico. If we look at the full picture, we can see that we’ve created more jobs for the two countries working this way. Then, here comes the political conflict, because we can see the impetus of protectionism in specific areas, even though in a broader sense, what we’re seeing is that that cooperation is what is allowing us to compete more effectively on a global level. The challenge for our politicians is explaining this to our populations with specific examples so we can keep the two economies open.

LC: You have to have a broader vision to see that in North America, without distinguishing among the countries themselves, the impetus to the economy is the same.

CP: Absolutely. Now we’re focusing on North America, but let’s go on to the issue of climate change and renewable energies globally. This is a fundamental issue for the future of the planet. If we don’t deal with it now, we’re going to be forced to have to concern ourselves with it in 50 years, but by then large parts of our countries will have disappeared under water, while other parts will be completely arid, and we’ll be dealing with a natural disaster. In Copenhagen, we tried to get all the countries to begin international negotiations to reach a global understanding about how to control emissions that cause or foster climate change. Where are we going? We don’t know yet, but it’s important not to see Copenhagen as the end of climate change negotiations, but rather as the beginning of a new way of looking at the problem.

For years, many countries—including our own— denied that climate change was happening. Those times are gone.

However, implementing a new global policy and a policy in every country is going to be difficult because in the short term, we will have to meet certain costs, because cutting carbon dioxide emissions means that you have to put a price on it. If you don't, you create no incentives for that reduction. We'll also have to find other ways of producing energy. But for the time being, putting a price on carbon dioxide emissions will have an impact on sectors like the auto, metallurgy, aluminum, glass and cement industries. We have to see how we can support the workers in those sectors.

LC: In a transition, right?

CP: That transition has to be carried forward, and at the same time we have to start creating new ways of strengthening the economies. This is where we have a tremendous opportunity for Mexico and the United States, since Mexico's capacity for creating renewable energies —solar and wind, mainly— is tremendous.

In the southern United States, we have very large fields of windmills. In Mexico, Oaxaca is one of the places with the highest winds in the world. A few weeks ago in the United States, we approved a guarantee for an US\$80-million loan as part of a project we're financing together with the Inter-American Development Bank, which will help produce 250 megawatts of electricity using aeolian energy. And that's only the beginning. We're studying how to formulate the rules, the conditions, the transmissions systems, the standards, in order to produce renewable energy here in Mexico that can be used in the United States. Therefore, having standards is absolutely essential because the production of this kind of energy has to jibe with the methods we have in the U.S. For example, by 2020, 30 percent of renewable energy will be produced in California. The thrust of these investments will come mostly from the United States because that's where most of the demand is. So, we have to see how we can harmonize standards to ensure that Mexico has the incentives needed for the investment required.

LC: What do you imagine the region will be like in 50 years? Can we expect supranational integration to be consolidated in North America, respecting the specificities of each country with support from the public, unlike the case of NAFTA, in which certain political sectors of the three countries blame it for all of our ills? In short, do you imagine Mexico-U.S. relations —let's bring Canada into the equation if you like—

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will in coming years achieve deeper, much friendlier integration, in which the historical lack of understanding that has troubled us in the past will have been reduced?

CP: I think we're at a historic point worldwide where we have to change what we think about integration among all countries and how we function *vis-à-vis* a global system. We're in a world where capital, labor, ideas and technologies recognize no frontiers, and we have to understand a reality in which there are millions of people living in poverty, in which we have witnessed the re-launch of countries like China and India, but also of Mexico. Fifteen years ago, it would have been difficult to think that Mexico could be involved with the world's main powers in the G-20 deciding the fate of the planet.

On the other hand, we have to recognize that there are threats that have no respect for borders, like drug traffickers and organized crime. We have to understand that we must cooperate and take advantage of our capabilities as never before, because the problems of today are such that no country can successfully face them alone. We've seen that if we manage to work together, we can be very successful, like in controlling the terrible economic recession. To do that, we have to open up and integrate our economies and implement new policies. We're going to continue working like this, since each country has a responsibility to its own population, but also a global responsibility. I think that in the future, we'll see a stronger, more dynamic integration of Mexico and the United States because we're in this together, and this is a time when the success of one can favor the other. Because it's unthinkable for one country to advance while another gets left behind. Those times are over, and we have to look to the future in a different way.

LC: Ambassador Pascual, thank you very much for your comments. **MM**

NOTES

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