



**North America, Security, and the Next US  
National Security Strategy:  
A Reflection**

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April 29, 2008

# **North America, Security, and the Next US National Security Strategy: A Reflection**

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## **Introduction**

Trade and investment among the three North American economies party to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been and still are important integration forces in the region, at least in economic terms. The relative sense of belonging to a North American region has been the framework for the Mexican, Canadian, and US governments to trilaterally cooperate in fields other than those covered by the NAFTA. That cooperation complements the multiple and already functional bilateral mechanisms between Canada and the US, and the US and Mexico, on a great number of issues.

However, lack of institutions, a sense of community, common interests and political will, in addition to opposing nationalistic groups in the three countries, are among the factors preventing further integration and the eventual creation of a European Union-like North American integrated region<sup>1</sup>.

US hegemony in the current global order and its post 9/11 security concerns have not only strengthened the American sense of exceptionalism, but also of vulnerability. Among US national security foreign policy priorities, Canada, Mexico, and “North America” as a trilateral idea, have lost the relative importance they enjoyed in the post Cold War but pre-9/11 era. Friendly and cooperative relations of the US with its neighbors have been constrained to the homeland security concerns of the world power and taken for granted in the absence of any significant crisis.

The very integrity of NAFTA is among the issues that could lead to contention among Mexico, Canada, and the US, if the next American president tries to implement ill-advised commitments concerning NAFTA. Furthermore, undocumented immigration, as a contentious issue and concern in the United States, does not and will not help constructive or positive attitudes toward Mexico.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pastor, Robert. “North America’s Second Decade.” *Foreign Affairs* 83:1, January/February 2004.

That situation is not likely to change with the next administration in the United States. The “war” against terrorism is likely to remain at the top of the agenda, along with new potential threats to the global interests of the United States.

Nevertheless, the security concerns of the United States, Canada, and Mexico and, especially, economic interests, guarantee the continuity of the close and quotidian ties between the North American countries, be they in the form of the traditional bilateral relationships or of incipient trilateral cooperation mechanisms in North America:

Numerous bilateral mechanisms between the US and each of its neighbors concerning defense, law enforcement and, in general, security issues guarantee a fluid exchange of information and cooperation between US agencies and their Mexican and Canadian counterparts.

On the trilateral front, the US-driven Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America (SPP) addresses mainly transborder US homeland security concerns and provides for a trilateral “attitude” towards the numerous items on its agenda, composed mostly by issues bilaterally addressed by the US and its neighbors.

Needless to say, traditional asymmetry prevailing between the US and its neighbors permeates every area of cooperation between them, bilaterally or trilaterally. Security has not been the exception.

This essay’s main objective is to present the author’s personal reflections on:

- 1) The diminishing relative importance of Canada and Mexico in the formal sources for US global security interests, their roles being confined to that country's homeland security agenda, and how the next US government is not likely to change that state of affairs.
- 2) Security cooperation in North America.

For the purposes of this essay, the term “security” will mainly refer to what the three North American governments consider to be part of their national security interests, threats, and priorities, deeply related to their foreign policy priorities. National security will be understood broadly, comprising the security of a nation’s territory, people, government and institutions, and the economic and social conditions under which a stable functioning of the state are preserved.<sup>2</sup>

The essay is structured as follows:

**1) North America, Canada, and Mexico in the past, current, and future national security priorities of the US**

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<sup>2</sup> Since the definition of national security differs among nations, the author selected this concept, which adapts the definition used by the Mexican armed forces, a definition that includes economic and social stability and democratic governance. Under this definition, national security cannot be separated from economic development, in the case of Mexico. Bibliography in this regard is not publicly available.

In this section, specific references to Canada and Mexico in the US National Security Strategies (1991 - 2006), as well as in the Homeland Security Strategies of 2002 and 2007, are presented.

Reference is also made to the main issues that are likely to be among the future foreign policy and security priorities of the US according to political analysts and periodicals. Thoughts are offered on how NAFTA could turn into an even more contentious issue.

## **2) Conclusions and some thoughts on North American security relations**

In this section, conclusions are drawn from the analysis in section 1.

In addition, general comments are made by the author concerning North American security relations and two of its determinant factors: Convergence or divergence of interests and priorities, especially between Canada and Mexico; and the current crime-related violence in Mexico and Central America as a security threat for North America.

## **1) North America, Canada, and Mexico in the national security priorities of the US**

Each administration in the United States is mandated by law to prepare a National Security Strategy (NSS). As part of a major restructuring of the Department of Defense and the armed forces, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act requires the Executive branch to annually submit an articulation of “national grand strategy” including the “worldwide interests, goals, and objectives of the United States that are vital to the national security...foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities.”<sup>3</sup>

The timing of the Act is revealing: The end of the Cold War and bipolarity was clearly foreseeable, and adversarial defense and foreign policies towards the Soviet Union would clearly serve little purpose under the next global order. The institutional and legal framework created by the 1947 National Security Act<sup>4</sup> would require a “National Grand Strategy” different from the opposition to communism.

The mandate of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was interpreted by the Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II administrations and reflected in their respective National Security Strategies. Their NSSs, however, instead of displaying a comprehensive and detailed “grand strategy”, became more and more a vehicle of communication to Congress containing each administration’s priorities.<sup>5</sup>

Following that argument, and given the fact that the National Security of the United States –as the current sole world hegemon-- is deeply related to international security and the state of world affairs, the NSS thematic and regional approach provides the best proxy of each administration’s foreign policy priorities. As provided by the text of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, these priorities are closely related to US defense, social, and international economic policies.

### **1.1) *North America* and the US National Security Strategies (NSS)**

The first Bush and Clinton administration NSSs focused on the role of the US in a post Cold War era witnessing the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern bloc, the consolidation of the European Union, and the growing importance and creation of regional economic and trade blocs along with the maturity of the global trade talks and the World Trade Organization.

Those texts had as overall goals: 1) Sovereignty, freedom, independence, and security as a nation; 2) Economic freedom and trade at home and abroad; 3) Maintaining healthy alliances and relations with the international community in the execution of foreign

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Parker (2005), p 1

<sup>4</sup> The National Security Act of 1947 mandated a major reorganization of the foreign policy and military establishments of the U.S. Government. The act created many of the institutions formulating and implementing foreign policy: among others, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

<sup>5</sup> Parker (2005), p 1.

policy, and 4) The promotion of freedom, democracy, and values (particularly human rights) abroad.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.1.1) The 1991 National Security Strategy of the US**

This text was published by the Bush administration when NAFTA had not yet been negotiated, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union was imminent, and when the US was engaged in the Gulf War.

In the 1991 NSS, Mexico received two distinct mentions: one on public debt restructuring and the other as part of discussions towards a trilateral free trade agreement with Canada<sup>7</sup>.

Canada is mentioned regarding global trade talks, as part of future NAFTA talks, and, surprisingly, as transit country for cocaine and heroine into the US.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly enough, Mexico is not mentioned in relation to illicit drug trafficking. Neither are the difficulties that drugs posed at the time for the US-Mexico bilateral relationship, nor the incipient binational cooperation schemes developed at the time in that regard.<sup>9</sup> Mexico was absent from the paragraphs concerning immigration, which focused on the refugee dilemma posed by the fall of the Eastern bloc.

### **1.1.2) The Clinton administration's 1995 -2000 National Security Strategies**

In its eight years, the Clinton administration presented six NSSs, almost meeting the annual legal mandate of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The first one was published in 1995, when NAFTA had already entered into force and its benefits were already apparent.

An important element in terms of Mexico as part of US national security was explicitly displayed in the first Clinton administration's NSS, in 1995.

"...the United States took the lead in marshaling international support to assist the country in meeting this challenge. This decision reflected the President's belief that the United States has a strong interest in prosperity and stability in Mexico and that it is in our economic and strategic interest that Mexico's economic reform program succeeds..."

The 1995 and 1996 texts state "...NAFTA has already created nearly 310,000<sup>10</sup> American jobs because of exports to our NAFTA partners. NAFTA has also increased

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<sup>6</sup> Parker (2005) p 6.

<sup>7</sup> The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States, August 1991. Webpage of the Air University's Center for Strategy and Technology, as of April of 2008.  
<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nss/nss-0891.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. "...We can also expect increasingly energetic efforts to import cocaine and heroin into the United States, including the use of longer-range aircraft entering U.S. airspace via Canada and of drug-laden cargo containers transshipped to the United States via Europe and the Pacific"

<sup>9</sup> See Dominguez, Jorge I. and Rafael Fernandez de Castro. "International Security." *The US and Mexico: Between Partnership and Conflict*. Routledge, New York, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Up from the 100,000 jobs mentioned in the 1995 NSS.

Mexico's capacity to cooperate with our nation on a wide range of issues that cross our 2,000 mile border -- including the environment, narcotics trafficking and illegal immigration. This Free Trade Act helped insulate our trade relationship with Mexico and protect and increase U.S. exports to that country -- and the jobs they support -- during the 1995 Mexican financial crisis and the subsequent economic recession and adjustment period..."<sup>11</sup>

In several paragraphs of the 1996-1999 versions of the text, the Clinton administration portrayed NAFTA as a job-creating success story, a fact that should definitely make its way in the current electoral debate.

While in the 1995 version Canada was mentioned only in association with Mexico and the NAFTA, in 1996 Canada was implicitly referred to as part of American participation in the G-7 and as part of the extension of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) Agreement .

In the 1997 NSS, a qualitative change was that Mexico "deserved" more detailed mention in sections referring to counternarcotic policies. Canada, Mexico, and North America were still mentioned all together in the trade-related sections and, along with the US, in reference to the large share the North American GDP had among all APEC economies.

Another qualitative change in the 1997 NSS was that the US explicitly recognized Mexico, Canada, and Venezuela as strategic energy suppliers.<sup>12</sup> This information prevailed until the last NSS text of the Clinton administration in 2000. Canada and Mexico are still the first and third oil suppliers to the US.<sup>13</sup>

The 1998, 1999, and 2000 NSSs provide the most comprehensive texts of US national security. The binomial formed by Canada and Mexico started breaking apart as the text reflects the beginning of the OAS sponsored "Summit diplomacy" in the Americas, and Mexico became more and more part of sections addressing regional drug trafficking and the unprecedented US-Mexico bilateral cooperation in that regard during the Zedillo

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1996.

<sup>12</sup> "...The United States depends on oil for more than 40 percent of its primary energy needs... we are also undergoing a fundamental shift in our reliance on imported oil away from the Middle East. Venezuela is now the number one foreign supplier to the United States; Canada, Mexico and Venezuela combined supply more than twice as much oil to the United States as the Arab OPEC countries." A National Security Strategy for a New Century. May 1997.

<sup>13</sup> "Monthly data on the origins of crude oil imports in February 2008 has been released and it shows that two countries exported more than 1.50 million barrels per day to the United States. Including those countries, a total of three countries exported over 1.20 million barrels per day of crude oil to the United States (see table below). The top five exporting countries accounted for 70 percent of United States crude oil imports in February while the top ten sources accounted for approximately 88 percent of all U.S. crude oil imports. The top sources of US crude oil imports for February were Canada (1.920 million barrels per day), Saudi Arabia (1.614 million barrels per day), Mexico (1.231 million barrels per day), Nigeria (0.982 million barrels per day), and Venezuela (0.945 million barrels per day)." Energy Information Administration of the US Government. *February 2008 Import Highlights: April 28, 2008*.

administration.<sup>14</sup> US-Mexico binational efforts concerning education, cultural institutions and artists, health, and environment at the common border are the subject of some paragraphs.<sup>15</sup>

Canada was explicitly and implicitly mentioned concerning NAFTA, US energy security (see above), hemispheric diplomacy, and the G-7/8.

In the 2000 and last NSS under Clinton, Mexico's elections were defined as the "freest and most transparent presidential and general elections in the country's history..."<sup>16</sup>

### **1.1.3) The US National Security Strategies after September 11, 2001 and the advent of Homeland Security**

The current Bush administration has published two NSSs: the first in 2002, and an updated version in March 2006.

The 2002 NSS states that "...The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests. The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better. Our goals on the path to progress are clear: political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity."

Against conventional wisdom, George W Bush's post-9/11 NSS of 2002, and its more extensive update of 2006, do not simply substitute the goals of former administrations with antiterrorist policies and actions. Those goals remained largely intact, while the new post-9/11 ones were added: " 1) Rooting out terrorism and its sponsors through aggressive military, economic, political, and informational use of US power in conjunction with its allies; 2) Strengthened homeland defenses, consequence management of terrorist attacks, intelligence, law enforcement, counter proliferation/non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and financial regulation to isolate terrorists and its sponsors; 3) An implied attempt for codification of unilateral and "preemptive action" as a possible response to the new threats posed by terrorist and weapons of mass destruction; and 4) Alliances to achieve the national objectives... all within the context of a "non-negotiable" demand for human dignity."<sup>17</sup>

The new approach, however, obviously reflects the need for institutional development, military strengthening, promotion of democracy and economic freedom with policies and actions to prevent and punish terrorism. It outlines preemptive policies against terrorism, with or without accompanying coalitions, as well as the transformation of the intelligence

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<sup>14</sup> The 1998,1999, and 2000 US NSS, although stating that the worst of the crack-cocaine consumption crisis in the US had receded, explicitly considered drug trafficking and organized crime as security threats. This thematic importance would be extraordinarily diminished in the post 9/11 NSS.

<sup>15</sup> The White House. *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*. 1998

<sup>16</sup> The White House. *A National Security Strategy for the Global Age*. Washington, D.C., 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Parker (2005) p. 3.

and defense apparatus that would lead to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the restructuring of the Department of Defense.

A significant and not surprising qualitative difference between the pre- and the post-9/11 texts is that neither North America in a trilateral fashion, nor Canada or Mexico as trade partners would find suitable or meaningful accommodation:

In the 2002 NSS, Canada was mentioned among military coalition partners along with Europe and NATO. Among the US trade-related priorities in the text, is “to resolve ongoing disputes with the European Union, Canada, and Mexico...”<sup>18</sup>

Under the topic “Working with others in defusing regional conflicts”, Mexico and Canada, along with Brazil, Chile, and Colombia, were mentioned as part of a group of countries with which the US had “...formed *flexible coalitions*... Together we will promote a truly democratic hemisphere where our integration advances security, prosperity, opportunity, and hope.”<sup>19</sup>

Not even bilateral cooperation with Mexico against drug trafficking was in the minds of the post-9/11 security strategists: “Parts of Latin America confront regional conflict, especially arising from the violence of drug cartels and their accomplices. This conflict and unrestrained narcotics trafficking could imperil the health and security of the United States. Therefore we have developed an active strategy to help the Andean nations adjust their economies, enforce their laws, defeat terrorist organizations, and cut off the supply of drugs, while—as important—we work to reduce the demand for drugs in our own country.”<sup>20</sup>

An expanded and updated version of the NSS, published in March of 2006, restored modest mentions of Canada and Mexico. The first one was implicit, not obviously referring to North American countries exclusively, but certainly using reconciliatory language: “America’s relations with other nations have been strong enough to withstand differences and *candid* exchanges of views... Some of our oldest and closest friends disagreed with U.S. policy in Iraq. There are ongoing and serious debates with our allies about how best to address the unique and evolving nature of the global terrorist threat.”<sup>21</sup>

As part of the regional sections of the 2006 NSS, the already well-established bilateral and trilateral cooperative efforts with Mexico and Canada, especially through the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America, were modestly reflected: “...Our strategy for the Hemisphere begins with deepening key relationships with Canada and Mexico, a foundation of shared values and cooperative policies that can be extended throughout the region. We must continue to work with our neighbors in the Hemisphere

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<sup>18</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Sep 2002.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*. This Andean approach to the drug problems seems to revert to the overall goal of the US “War on Drugs” of the mid-eighties, which mainly focused on that region. More likely, the text is a reassertion of the Plan Colombia and instability in that country, while cooperation with Mexican agencies was well underway and drug- related violence in Mexico was not critical.

<sup>21</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006.

to reduce illegal immigration and promote expanded economic opportunity for marginalized populations.”<sup>22</sup>

The 2006 NSS reflects also –and only-- as “challenges of globalization” issues like “Public health challenges like pandemics (HIV/AIDS, avian influenza) that recognize no borders...illicit trade, whether in drugs, human beings, or sex, that exploits the modern era’s greater ease of transport and exchange...Environmental destruction, whether caused by human behavior or cataclysmic mega-disasters such as floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tsunamis...*These challenges are not traditional national security concerns, such as the conflict of arms or ideologies. But if left unaddressed they can threaten national security.*”

It is very indicative that these “global challenges,” whose importance as threats is far lower than terrorism-based US security concerns, are high up on the list of security threats of Canada and, especially, Mexico. In fact, they are threats to a “multidimensional” concept of hemispheric security, promoted by Mexico, and formally adopted by the OAS membership in Mexico City in October 2003. At the time, the US reluctantly joined the consensus on a text where defense issues and terrorism shared the spectrum of security threats with the “non traditional” issues mentioned above.<sup>23</sup> Not surprisingly, all of those issues are either directly or tangentially addressed by the trilateral agendas of the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America from 2005 and on.

#### **1.1.4) Homeland Security, Canada and Mexico**

After the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, the concept of *homeland security* was developed and formalized by the Bush administration in an Office, a Council, and a Homeland Security Strategy (HSS). In 2002, 22 different agencies were joined under the new Department of Homeland Security, which now has over 200,000 employees and an annual budget of around 50 billion dollars.

Emotionally charged as it sounds, *homeland security* conceptually separates issues affecting the US domestically and territorially from those which could threaten it as a nation-state and world power.

The US’s strong, complex, and asymmetrical defense and security bilateral relations with Canada and Mexico always suggested that US policies towards its neighbors were not only taken for granted but also part of its domestic agenda. However, it was after 9/11 that the US *formally* placed strategic relations with its North American neighbors and partners as part of its domestic “risk agenda”, i.e., its Homeland Security Strategy and related programs and actions.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See: Organization of American States. *Declaration on Security in the Americas*, Mexico City, 2003. [http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/DeclaracionSecurity\\_102803.asp](http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/DeclaracionSecurity_102803.asp)

As in the case of the National Security Strategy, the Bush Administration published two versions of the Homeland Security Strategy (HSS), one in 2002 and a second one in 2007.

The conceptual link between National Security and Homeland Security is described in the 2002 text:

“The National Security Strategy of the United States aims to guarantee the sovereignty and independence of the United States, with our fundamental values and institutions intact. It provides a framework for creating and seizing opportunities that strengthen our security and prosperity. The National Strategy for Homeland Security complements the National Security Strategy of the United States by addressing a very specific and uniquely challenging threat – terrorism in the United States – and by providing a comprehensive framework for organizing the efforts of federal, state, local and private organizations whose primary functions are often unrelated to national security.

The link between national security and homeland security is a subtle but important one. For more than six decades, America has sought to protect its own sovereignty and independence through a strategy of global presence and engagement. In so doing, America has helped many other countries and peoples advance along the path of democracy, open markets, individual liberty, and peace with their neighbors. Yet there are those who oppose America’s role in the world, and who are willing to use violence against us and our friends. Our great power leaves these enemies with few conventional options for doing us harm. One such option is to take advantage of our freedom and openness by secretly inserting terrorists into our country to attack our homeland. Homeland security seeks to deny this avenue of attack to our enemies and thus to provide a secure foundation for America’s ongoing global engagement. Thus the National Security Strategy of the United States and National Strategy for Homeland Security work as mutually supporting documents, providing guidance to the executive branch departments and agencies.”<sup>24</sup>

The 2002 HSS elaborates on the hierarchy among the various “strategies” related to security issues, some of them intrinsically linked to North American relations:

“There are also a number of other, more specific strategies maintained by the United States that are subsumed within the twin concepts of national security and homeland security. The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism will define the U.S. war plan against international terrorism. The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction coordinates America’s many efforts to deny terrorists and states the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. The National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace will describe our initiatives to secure our information systems against deliberate, malicious disruption. The National Money Laundering Strategy aims to undercut the illegal flows of money that support terrorism and international criminal activity. The National Defense Strategy sets priorities for our most powerful national security instrument. The National Drug Control Strategy lays out a comprehensive U.S. effort to combat drug smuggling and consumption. All of these documents fit into the framework established by the National Security Strategy of the United States and National Strategy for Homeland Security, which together take precedence over all other national strategies, programs, and plans.”<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, it is the section on Border and Transportation Security and the one on International Cooperation of the 2002 HSS that explain the role of interaction with the Northern and Southern neighbors:

“America historically has relied heavily on two vast oceans and two friendly neighbors for border security, and on the private sector for most forms of domestic transportation security. The increasing mobility and destructive potential of modern terrorism has required the United States to rethink and rearrange fundamentally its systems for border and transportation security... We therefore must promote the efficient

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<sup>24</sup> The White House. *National Security Strategy*. [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/nat\\_strat\\_hls.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/nat_strat_hls.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

and reliable flow of people, goods, and services across borders, while preventing terrorists from using transportation conveyances or systems to deliver implements of destruction.<sup>26</sup>

The 2002 text also identifies what, at the time, were the major US international homeland security initiatives, which already were or would become part of the antiterrorism agenda items of countless international organizations and arrangements: among others the UN<sup>27</sup>, the Organization of American States<sup>28</sup>, APEC, G-7/8, and, of course, the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America in 2005 and thereafter:

- Create “smart borders.”
- Combat fraudulent travel documents.
- Increase the security of international shipping containers.
- Intensify international law enforcement cooperation.
- Help foreign nations fight terrorism.
- Expand protection of transnational critical infrastructure.
- Review obligations to international treaties and law.

The Bush administration released its second HSS in October 2007, which can be viewed not only as a legacy, regarding numerous measures by an administration eager to prevent more terrorist attacks and to defend the homeland, but also as a public statement useful to balance the lack of popularity of the Bush administration among public opinion and Congress, especially because of the management of more traditional national security concerns such as the “war” on terror and the Iraq occupation.

While the main focus of the 2002 HSS was terrorism, the 2007 HSS ventured into a wider agenda, including response to natural disasters (as a consequence of Hurricane Katrina), health threats, defense of critical infrastructure, and risk management in cases of accidents involving hazardous materials or “man made disasters.” Under the new approach, and as the legacy of *Katrina*, management of risks and especially disaster relief would be a shared responsibility of federal, state, local, and tribal authorities.

Prevention against terrorism, however, remains the first and most important homeland security threat addressed by the Strategy. It is also under that topic that North American security relations remained.

While the 2007 HSS has not a single reference to Canada or Mexico as such, the 2007 HSS formalizes plans, legislation, and measures conceived and adopted after 2001 (but not yet included in the 2002 text), some of them of great concern for both of the US friendly and resigned neighbors:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (September 2001), tabled by the US and unanimously approved, makes mandatory for all UN members the legislation and implementation of antiterrorism measures in several fields, including border security, financing, and law enforcement cooperation, among others.

<sup>28</sup> The annually approved Work Program of the Interamerican Commission against Terrorism (aka CICTE, its Spanish acronym) of the OAS contains similar obligations, also implied in the text of the Interamerican Convention against Terrorism of 2002.

- Actions related to “Border Security and Interior Enforcement” focus on the migration status of persons entering, studying, working or just being in the United States, behind a rationale that terrorists could be among them; needless to say, such a vision affects the millions of Mexican undocumented workers (and Canadians as well) in the United States and their families. Also, this rationale strongly linked what Mexico and its bilateral and multilateral foreign policy had tried to keep distinct: migration and terrorism.
- On the Canadian side –and on the Mexican as well, to a lesser extent-- measures such as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative aimed at “Screening people” and restricting the number of travel documents accepted by US immigration authorities at the border points of entry, will harm the fluid interaction of what is a *de facto* US-Canadian transnational society, a critical aspect of Canadian economic and national security.<sup>29</sup>
- The “Real ID” program, aimed at rising security standards of identification documents and driver licenses all across the US will only worsen the alienation and vulnerability of undocumented Mexican (and some Canadian) workers.
- Initiatives involving pre-screening and voluntary pre-certification of business shipping to the US, such as the Container Security Initiative and the Customs-Trade Partnership against Terrorism, form part of the US driven initiatives in the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America.

Thus, North American security relations became part of “the other” security agenda of the United States: The one that formally internalizes certain aspects of the US foreign policy into fear- and vulnerability-driven measures aimed at protecting the country mainly from more terrorist attacks.

## **1.2) The foreign policy and security priorities of the next administration in the United States**

One of the most frequent topics when analysts deal with current US foreign policy is the US lack of popularity in the world arena. The commonly evoked “Why do they hate us?” superficially characterizes what in reality is the complex range of geopolitical and economic issues at play in the post-cold war and post-9/11 era, and the role the United States should have.

Most analysts agree that US national security priorities in a new administration will not differ much from the current ones and that terrorism will undoubtedly stay among the most significant items of the agenda. However, there are certain topics that would require a different approach, given what is perceived as a failure of the George W. Bush administration’s foreign policy.

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<sup>29</sup> See Reginald Stuart (2007) Chapter 11.

Issues that the next US National Security Strategy might address include:<sup>30</sup>

- 1) The presence of the US in Iraq will still present formidable challenges in terms not only of electoral climate –and output–, but also of public policy on terrorism, immediate withdrawal or non-withdrawal of its troops, and the related political and financial costs.
- 2) Iran and the need for an “understanding” with the US– or the lack thereof—, as a fundamental factor for security balance.
- 3) A “coming nuclear proliferation wave” in the world and its menacing ramifications involving “rogue states.”
- 4) Russia as a potential threat to the interests of the US and some of its allies.
- 5) Burma, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and the challenges that illegitimacy or state-sponsored threats could pose for US and world security.
- 6) Relations with large and influential emerging economies like China and India, and how to incorporate them as economic and security allies, as well as co-cooperating countries in the development of regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and among Arab countries.
- 7) Prevalence of the fight against Al Qaida, and relations with Pakistan and actions in Afghanistan.
- 8) Preserving the NATO alliance<sup>31</sup>
- 9) Undergirding the security of allies such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, Israel and the Gulf Arabs.

Academic and media discussions on the next foreign policy and security priorities of the US deal with the different approaches towards world issues: relying more on multilateral institutions and less on unilateralism; balancing the use of “soft power” (cooperation assistance, cultural diplomacy, etc) and military or “hard power.”

Not surprisingly, Canada and Mexico --let alone North America-- are not among the foreseeable US national security priorities; friendly, cooperative, and functional relations, positive in the bilateral realm and sometimes divergent but mainly inconsequential in the multilateral arena, pose no threat to US interests. Neither Mexico nor Canada compromise international security or contravene American economic or geostrategical interests.

However, as part of this public brainstorming, and especially under the current fierce pre-electoral climate, a sense of preference for “isolationism” prevails in the minds of some Americans.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, that sense of isolationism accompanies a strengthened sense of exceptionalism, vulnerability, and even self-victimization that permeates issues such as free trade, migration, and border management, issues strongly related to North American relations. According to polls by the Pew Research Center, “...the proportion of Americans who think that free trade benefits their country has fallen from 78% in 2002 to 59% today. Attitudes to illegal immigration have hardened even more. Three quarters of

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<sup>30</sup> “Foreign policy challenges facing the next president,” (2008).

<sup>31</sup> “All Change?” *The Economist*, March 29, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> “After Bush,” p 14: “... 42% of Americans now believe the US should ‘mind its own business.’”

Americans now say that there should be more restrictions on people coming to live in the country.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that an isolationist US foreign policy is not feasible, public opinion does shape public policy. The defeat of legislative bills seeking “fast track” authority for the administration on trade, immigration reform, and the approval of security measures authorizing the construction of a fence along the border with Mexico are compelling examples.<sup>34</sup> The US Free Trade Agreement with Colombia seems to be the latest scapegoat in this regard.

Despite the conciliatory language of the Democratic candidates in meeting with Hispanics in states bordering Mexico and advocating closer relations with that country, it is the anti-NAFTA rhetoric among “blue-collar” constituents that, if implemented, could alienate the next US administration from its North American neighbors.

Even though that rhetoric mainly refers to environmental and labor provisions of the NAFTA –currently part of side agreements-- as well as denouncing the treaty itself, it is difficult to assess to what extent the candidates really mean what they declare.

Hillary Clinton’s top economic adviser, Gene Sperling, provided rare clarity on the issue in an interview in Ottawa.<sup>35</sup> Mr. Sperling stated that Mrs. Clinton meant what she said about NAFTA and free trade in general. He shed more light on what the renegotiation of the trade agreement could entail: “Ms. Clinton wants to incorporate labor and environmental standards into the core of the agreement. She also wants to renegotiate the power of the agreement to set up tribunals that force governments to change their policies if they harm the interests of investors.” Moreover, Mr. Sperling said that “Ms. Clinton’s messages on changing NAFTA were not meant for Canada or Mexico in particular, but for showing American workers that globalization can work for them...It is aimed at ensuring that our trade agreements and our engagement in the global economy is truly raising living standards and helping workers in the United States, as well in our trading partners... We need these full reforms to make NAFTA what it should be, for American workers and American communities.”

Overwhelmingly, analysts and editorial comments in major newspapers in the US, Canada, and Mexico have criticized the dangerous anti-NAFTA rhetoric under the common knowledge that campaigns make bad policy.

It remains to be seen if under the pressure of the actual campaign for the presidency John McCain, the Republican candidate, retains his positive stance on NAFTA, even at the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Scoffield, Heather. “Clinton Ready to Walk Away from NAFTA, Advisor Warns.” *The Globe and Mail Online*. March 28, 2008.

cost of alienating potential voters among the “blue collar” communities to which Senator Clinton especially has so strongly appealed.<sup>36</sup>

In any case, if the next president of the US, belonging to either party, decides to play the anti-NAFTA card, the fate of the agreement and the feeble North American identity will most probably depend, as it did 15 years ago, on the will of conservative democrats in Congress, given that analysts predict that the Democratic party will widen its majority in both the House and the Senate<sup>37</sup>.

In the absence of relevant security interests involving North America that the US would include among its security and foreign policy priorities, preserving NAFTA becomes the core *symbol* and goal for any effort aimed at further North American integration.

Emphasis is made on “symbol”, since the strong economic and security interests, social ties and cooperation mechanisms among Canada, Mexico, and the US will go nowhere. They will stay very much alive in the pursuit of each nation’s interests; in the intense, multiform and asymmetrical bilateral and trilateral cooperation mechanisms, and in the fear-based US homeland security agenda.

## **2) Conclusions and some thoughts on North American security relations**

### **2.1) Conclusions**

According to the US National Security Strategies 1991 to 2006, Canada, Mexico, and *North America* as such experienced diminishing importance among US foreign and security priorities as of the second Clinton administration.

Between 1995 and 1998, NAFTA was portrayed as a distinct positive achievement and a job-creating mechanism with the United States. Mentions of the North American countries as a triad extended to participation in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation mechanism (APEC) and their combined relative economic importance among the countries of the Pacific Rim. In addition, as a result of the 1994-95 Mexican financial crisis and the US emergency aid, Mexico appears in those texts as a nation directly linked to US economic security while Canada held roles as a security and defense partner of the US and member of the G-8.

After 1997, Canada and Mexico, along with Venezuela, began to be considered strategic partners for US energy security, a fact that found no space in the post-9/11 NSS.

The second Clinton administration revised the previous NSS texts and the focus on North America changed. NAFTA became only part of the global US trade interests, and the

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<sup>36</sup> Bumiller, Elisabeth. “Pro-NAFTA McCain Delivers Bad News to Ohio Audience,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2008.

<sup>37</sup> See “After Change?” in *The Economist*, March 2008, p 7.

joint work and presence of the NAFTA partners in multilateral trade mechanisms vanished. Canada was increasingly mentioned as a security and defense ally, and Mexico was mentioned primarily in connection to cooperation on drug trafficking and border security. The 2000 Mexican presidential election was depicted as a success story for the US policy of promoting human rights and democracy.

The attacks on September 11, 2001 changed the scope and priorities of the US administration in such a way that Canada, Mexico, and North America almost disappeared in the 2002 and 2006 NSSs. The US “war” on terror and conflict management permeated almost every aspect of the texts, and Mexico and Canada were viewed as either part of “flexible” like-minded US partnerships in the Hemisphere or, in the case of Canada, as part of military and defense alliances involved in the “war” against terrorism.

In that sense, US international economic and security interaction with Canada and Mexico formally became part of its mostly domestic unilateral agenda aimed at preventing further terrorist attacks on American soil: the homeland security agenda.

In a reverse trend concerning diminishing mentions in the documental sources of national security and foreign policy priorities, Canada and Mexico were prominent cooperative factors in the first Homeland Security Strategy of the US of 2002. Even though the scope of “homeland security” was expanded between 2002 and 2007, when the second HSS was published Canada and Mexico remained under the umbrella of the “war” against terrorism.

The major initiatives and programs in the 2002 and 2007 Homeland Security Strategies concerning international cooperation against terrorism have been and are part of bilateral and multilateral US diplomacy, greatly influencing and determining agendas and work programs of international organizations and various consultation and harmonization multilateral mechanisms. Most of the 2002 homeland security initiatives and programs – like the smart border agreements-- already were part of the post 9/11 immediate cooperation mechanisms with Mexico and Canada. Others, evolving after 2001, like the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, the Real ID Act, or numerous actions involving migration controls, directly affect the citizens of Canada and Mexico; their implementation is certain to play a contentious role and to cause further irritation in the always asymmetrical and power-driven relationship of the US with its neighbors.

Given the state of world affairs, an increasing sense of exceptionalism and vulnerability among Americans, and the grave internal conditions that issues like the Iraq war pose, this state of affairs is not likely to change in the short run. Therefore, many aspects of relations with Canada and Mexico will remain as part of the domestic security agenda of the United States, and away from the next administration’s National Security Strategy.

Border security, immigration, and job-losses attributed to NAFTA are issues that play negatively in the dynamics of the electoral environment in the US. It remains to be seen if

the electoral rhetoric on the renegotiation and eventual denunciation of NAFTA by the US translates into the public policy of the next administration.

As relevant as Canada and Mexico could be for the US homeland security, being part of that fear-based agenda is far from the special bilateral or regional relationship that Canada and Mexico would like to have with the US.

For now, security relations in North America have little or no room to maneuver beyond the traditional incremental and dual-bilateral state of affairs, along with the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) for North America.

The fate of the SPP is uncertain as well. The need to cooperate with the US for the sake of their economies would certainly provide for renewed Canadian and Mexican resolve to keep the SPP work going. However, even if the SPP thematic groups continue their work with the new US government, it remains to be seen if the next US president will be willing to continue participating in the summit diplomacy inherent to the SPP. Moreover, if NAFTA were to be renegotiated, the climate of distress and tension that such a measure would impose upon trilateral and the dual-bilateral relations would be as enormous as it would be damaging.

## **2.2) Thoughts on North America and its security relations**

The role of security as a driving force for integration among North American countries has been not only discussed but even futuristically shaped as a “North American Security Perimeter” involving trilaterally established interests, border documents and action plans, as well as expanded border infrastructure.<sup>38</sup>

The “integrationist” approach to a North American Community --trilaterally addressing further economic and regulatory integration, competitiveness, social development in order to narrow the development gap between Mexico and its regional partners, and a security perimeter-- remains the best approach to cooperative and effective security relations in the region.<sup>39</sup>

However, in the realm of the immediately possible, asymmetry, mostly dual-bilateralism, incrementalism, and the political will of the next US administration are factors that will likely determine security relations in North America.

In reference to sectoral aspects of cooperation among North American countries and their potential integration into a community, Stephen Clarkson asserts that certain aspects of harmonization and integration among Mexico, Canada, and the US “provide for example of significant transborder governance”, e.g. water management or steel. Others such as intellectual property rights for pharmaceuticals and financial services, are simply “a

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<sup>38</sup> See *Building a North American Community*, Council of Foreign Relations, New York, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> See Pastor, Robert. *A North American Community Approach to Security*, 2005.

manifestation of the US, Canada, and Mexico participation in global governance.”<sup>40</sup> However, security and defense relations in North America after the US declared its “war on terror” present a most straightforward reality:

“Washington’s sudden move to a security paradigm was dramatized for North America on September 11 by its immediate blockade of its two land borders. This unilateral action demonstrated that, once Washington declared its national security to be at stake, it would simple reassert its control over the policy space it had previously vacated in the name of trade liberalization. Its subsequent demands that Canada and Mexico do what it felt was necessary to make their exports safe for the United States showed how much of North American governance was unilaterally driven by Uncle Sam”<sup>41</sup>

From the “peripheral” side, Reginald Stuart (2007) defines it sharply in the case of Canada’s role in the defense of “Upper North America”, also applicable to Mexico:

“...The asymmetry of resources and motivation by default made Ottawa a dependent partner in North American security, but better a willing accomplice with a voice and presence than defiance that would certainly leave Upper North American security entirely under Washington’s control.”<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, polls in the three countries show a growing concern among the public for “safety and security” when it comes to border issues. Economic interests, sovereignty and freedom of movement lag far behind public concerns.<sup>43</sup> Frank Graves says that recent surveys show that “...47% of Americans support the construction of a wall at the Canadian border. As shocking as this statistic might be (given the history of the world’s longest undefended-shared border), it pales in comparison to the 70 percent of Americans who believe a wall at the Mexican border would be a good idea...Unsurprisingly, our Mexican polling found only 18-percent support for this idea among Mexican citizens.”<sup>44</sup> Partially explained by an all time low in popularity of President Bush’s foreign policy among the public and Congress, this last concern is something that high-level officials of the Department of Homeland Security, in their (probably) last months in office, are eager to pursue.

Under these circumstances, security relations in North America will have to keep creating a path of progress that can preserve sovereign Canadian and Mexican security interests while accommodating US (homeland) security needs. While far from desirable, this seems to be the only way forward; moreover, in a perverse way, it may be the only way to utilize security issues as concrete foundations for further integration in North America.

Security relations among nations depend on various factors, primarily individual national interests, capabilities, and perception of risk. North American security relations are not

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<sup>40</sup> See Stephen Clarkson (2007).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid p 96.

<sup>42</sup> Reginald Stuart (2007), p 242.

<sup>43</sup> See Frank Graves (2007), pp 120. For Canadians, sovereignty is the second priority, freedom of movement the third and economic advantage the last one. For Americans, freedom of movement comes second, economic advantage third and sovereignty is the last one. For Mexicans, economic advantage comes after security, then sovereignty and, interestingly enough, freedom of movement comes last.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Graves (2007), p 115.

the exception.<sup>45</sup> In North America, the overwhelming difference between US capabilities and those of its neighbors is determinant of the extent and depth of those relations.

In the author's view, in the short- and medium-terms, possibilities and limits for North American security relations must take into account several factors and shortcomings, such as convergence or divergence of interests, common perception of threats –or lack thereof--, and the planning and operational capabilities of each country. In North America, asymmetry and a far from perfect interagency coordination play an important role in the everyday security relations, mainly between various US agencies and their Mexican and Canadian counterparts, leading to misunderstandings and to hurt national sensitivities. Another relevant factor is the role the armed forces have in each country.

Thoughts on two of those factors, related to common interests and to perceptions of threat, are presented:

### **2.2.1) Convergence or divergence of interests and priorities, especially between Canada and Mexico**

Formally, the security interests of Canada, Mexico, and the US converge. In fact, between 2004 and 2005, Canada and Mexico developed specific public strategies and legislation that reflected the new, post-9/11 security relations with the US: Canada developed a National Security Policy<sup>46</sup> and an “International Policy Statement”, while Mexico adopted its National Security Law of 2005.<sup>47</sup> Their focus and approach on security is different, however. US interests are those of a world power (see section 1 above), while Canada's and Mexico's are not.

#### **Canada's formal security and foreign policy priorities**

Canada's security priorities, defined as *protecting Canada and Canadians at home and abroad, ensuring Canada is not a base for threats to our allies, and contributing to international security*,<sup>48</sup> aim at a delicate balance between sovereign and self-interested motivations and accommodation of US interests.

Current Canadian foreign policy priorities are: 1) Protecting Canadians and Rebuilding Afghanistan; 2) The Americas: United States, Mexico, Latin America and the Caribbean;

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<sup>45</sup> For a comprehensive research on North American contemporary security relations see Marcela Celorio (2006).

<sup>46</sup> See “Securing an Open Society:...” (2004).

<sup>47</sup> The US NSS and Canada's National Security share terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, failed states, natural disasters, and critical infrastructure vulnerability as national security threats. Intelligence, Border Security, Transport Security, Emergency Planning and Management, and Public Health are their key strategies to preserve security. Canada does emphasize Organized Crime as a main threat to its security, while the recent US National Security and Homeland Security strategies reduces it to the war on terror.

<sup>48</sup> Government of Canada, Privy Council's Office. *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*, Ottawa, April 2004. [http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=informationresources&Sub=publications&Doc=natsecurnat/natsecurnat\\_e.htm](http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=informationresources&Sub=publications&Doc=natsecurnat/natsecurnat_e.htm)

3) Emerging and growing markets, with a focus on China and India. In addition, “ongoing commitments” for 2007 and 2008 like “a safer, more secure and prosperous Canada within a strengthened North American partnership” are still observed.<sup>49</sup>

According to the latest *Speech from the Throne*, Canadian security and foreign policy priorities were updated to include Canada’s “re-engagement” in the Americas, the exercise of sovereign presence and resource planning in the Canadian High Arctic, and the reduction of violence in Canadian streets.

Canada’s engagement in international security reflects its proclivity for multilateralism, human security, and its traditional value-exporting strategy. This explains why Canada’s participation in Afghanistan as part of a NATO mission is described as “noble” in the *Speech from the Throne*. Notwithstanding the obvious benefits for Canada-US relations, Canada emphasizes nation-building as the driving force for its presence in Afghanistan, rather than its neighbor’s antiterrorist goals.

### **Mexico’s security and foreign policy priorities**

Reflecting a similar kind of balance between sovereign and internationally-driven interests, Mexican national security legislation contains the same common “North American” security threats that legally allow for international cooperation, mainly with the US<sup>50</sup>. However, Mexico includes territorial defense, unity of the State, and defense of the constitutional order and democracy as security priorities. Most importantly, the Mexican view directly links national security with “...the preservation of democracy, based on economic, social, and political development of the country and its people”<sup>51</sup> It is noteworthy that the law’s main purpose is not to define national security nor its threats, but to define interagency coordination concerning public policy in that regard.

In the case of Mexico, the government’s public policy priorities, including its foreign policy priorities, are addressed in the National Development Plan (PND, by its Spanish acronym) that each administration is mandated by law to prepare. In the 2007-2012 PND, the US, unsurprisingly, is the country most referred to in the text, in various capacities.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, “Our Priorities.”

<sup>50</sup> As opposed to the US and Canadian views where the concept of National Security derives from its threats and is closely related –especially in the case of the US-- to threats to international security in a global or regional context, the Mexican Law defines national security as “actions” aimed at preserving the very core of the country as a nation-state. Thus, threats to the security of Mexico are similar to those of the US and Canada (terrorism, espionage, illegal trafficking of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, actions against strategic facilities, actions preventing the state from acting against organized crime), but add some like “betrayal of the nation,” foreign interventions, and actions against the unity of the Federation.

<sup>51</sup> See *Ley de Seguridad Nacional*, art 3.

<sup>52</sup> In the current PND, the US is mentioned: as destination of emigrants (in the context of Mexican unemployment rates, the share of Mexicans in the US population, money remittances from migrants, “attention” to Mexican communities in the US, and the “accelerated capital human exodus” looking for better income levels); as a source of illegal arms in Mexico; in the context of diversification of economic

Ironically, Mexico shares with Canada its need for “re-engagement” with Latin America, a region from which the previous Mexican government became relatively alienated. However, as a result of the pragmatic Mexican foreign policy since the mid-eighties, based on economic interests and several free trade agreements, closer relations with Europe and Asia and the Pacific are also important regional objectives.

North America, in its trinational concept, is a prominent region to which Mexican economic, social, and political international relations are strongly committed<sup>53</sup>. A basic premise of the Mexican view towards North America is that its labor market is an integrated one.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Mexico – Canada connection<sup>55</sup>**

While relations with the US are the most relevant for Canada, interest in deepening relations with Mexico through the North American trade and security partnership is the basis for ongoing bilateral dialogue on various topics that transcend NAFTA’s scope. Law enforcement cooperation and incipient but substantive talks on defense and military issues are an essential and positive part of that effort.

However, further commitments with Latin America, as part of the current government “re-engagement” with the region have clear priorities: Haiti is number one, as part of the peace-keeping and human-security Canadian policy, which also inspires the Canadian presence in Afghanistan. Mexico’s stance of non-participation in international peacekeeping missions has made bilateral cooperation in that field impossible. That alone has left a vacuum filled by Brazil and Chile, countries that, along with Canada and the US, prominently participate in the UN peacekeeping operation in Haiti.

Canadian economic and cultural ties to the Anglophone Caribbean countries, especially Jamaica, have materialized in its strong presence in those countries, involving developmental aid, directly and indirectly protecting Canadians and their interests, and compatibility with their value-exporting policy. Mexico’s relations to the Caribbean have been, at best, nominal and lacking in resources to achieve a significant presence. The

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relations to lessen dependency from the “ups and downs” of the US economy; and in comparison with Mexico in terms of the share of its student population attending universities.

<sup>53</sup> Regionally speaking, the Mexican development plan is unambiguous: “North America is the region in the world with the most impact on the wellbeing and future of México, in human, economic, commercial, and political terms... (but, over 10 years after the NAFTA entered into force) North American region must adequate its dynamics of institutional interaction in order to adequately respond to new challenges related to competitiveness, growing regionalization and shared development...”

<sup>54</sup> Mexican PND: “everyday reality shows that labor markets of Mexico, the US, and Canada complement each other... the US labor market creates each year a demand of around half a million jobs for low-skilled workers, mostly filled by Mexican workforce. Also, in the US and in Canada there is a growing trend to receive specialized and high-skilled professionals.”

<sup>55</sup> Many of the facts and statements presented on Canada are derived from talks with officials at the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and Canada’s International Development Agency (CIDA). However, the drafting and interpretations of their statements is the exclusive responsibility of the author.

Caribbean could be a region where, once again, South American regional powers substitute for a role that Mexico could play along with Canadian interests.

Canadian and Mexican investment and trade policies towards Cuba have been issues that directly contravene US political and economic policies. Undoubtedly, whichever form the post-Castro state of affairs might take, Cuba is a potentially contentious issue among Canada, Mexico, and the United States, along with Spain and other countries with economic interests in the island.

In the multilateral field, Canada and Mexico view each other as natural parties for consultations. With the notable exception of treaties concerning controls in the smuggling of small arms, the three North American countries are parties to the major UN Conventions against organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption, and terrorism. Their common OECD membership allows for exchanges in a myriad of economic and development topics, as well as standards on financial controls against money laundering.

However, the real or perceived North American partnership has been costly to Mexico in terms of alienation from traditional negotiating groups of developing countries at the UN like the G-77. Mexico belongs to the Latin American and Caribbean consultation group of the UN General Assembly, while Canada and the US belong to the “Western Europe and others” group, along with countries such as Israel or Australia.

Since the European Union, the US, and the G-77 (including over 100 developing countries from Asia and Europe) tend to be the current major players at multilateral fora and conferences, Mexico tries to advance its interests --depending on the topic at stake-- by going back and forth between its Latin American regional partners and its *pragmatic and like-minded* OECD partners, informally exchanging views with Japan, the US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, as part of an “honorary” and *ad-hoc* membership to “JUSCANZ”, an informal consultation group formed by those countries.

Also, as contentious as the functioning and results of the NAFTA panels could be, trilateral environmental exchange under the NAFTA has provided for a convergent position between Canada and Mexico in technical multilateral conferences involving chemicals and hazardous waste, biodiversity, and related issues. That position may or may not coincide with US interests.

Having said that, and in spite of their commonalities and differences in approaches as countries with diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, wealth, and relative weight in the global arena, Canadian and Mexican strong economic interdependence with the US supports an undeniable fact: any sustained interruption in their flow of goods, investment, services, energy sources, and people with the US, for any reason, can become a much more severe security threat for those nations than any other formally stated national security threat, including terrorism and criminal activity. The US has proven that, if its security is at stake, it can unilaterally make that happen.

### **2.2.2. Reassessment of national threats as regional: drug- and arms-related trafficking violence in Mexico and the need to act in Central America**

In a departure from the historical trend, Mexico has asked the US, as a matter of co-responsibility, to strengthen its national power against drug- and arms trafficking- related violence that has become a real and sustained threat to the Mexican state.<sup>56</sup> That bilateral cooperation scheme contained in the “Mérida Initiative” – involving mainly further training, equipment, and strengthening of Mexican law enforcement and justice institutions by the US— is among issues yet to be considered by the US Congress in order to authorize budgetary allocations on the matter.

A fundamental factor on this matter is that the violence and disruptions in Mexico as a result of drugs and arms smuggling come from within its own territory and from beyond Mexico’s Southern border. Changing trends in cocaine trafficking led the Central American “corridor” to become a preferred way of transporting that illicit drug from South America to the US, through Mexico. Mirror flows of money and arms from the US into Mexico and Central America have enhanced the level of violence and economic and social disruptions that organized criminal organizations have imposed upon countries in the region.

Activities of criminal organizations in Central America, especially in Guatemala, are even more lethal to the security of the State, and institutional capacities to fight them in that region are less significant than in Mexico. Along with the presence of criminal gangs or *maras*, increasingly acting in conjunction with drug cartels, organized criminal groups are a real threat not only to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize, but also to Mexico and North America.

US cooperation with Mexico is key, as Mexico has publicly declared that the fight against drugs and organized crime in its territory requires international action and is, rightly so, a matter of corresponsibility that requires the attention and resources of the United States as well as Mexico. Nevertheless, current and future US modest cooperation with Mexico and Central America will still be a part of the now devalued *US War on Drugs*, deeply undercut by the *US War on Terror* and its homeland security policies.

In the overall perception of threats to the US National Security, drug trafficking has lost the importance it had in previous decades, especially after 9/11. Since cooperation with Mexico and Canada is ongoing, drug trafficking and organized crime have been reduced to mere complements of the homeland security strategy against terrorism.

Moreover, it seems that the decline in consumption of illicit drugs in the US, recently reported in the National Drug Control Strategy, could be a distracting and potentially very dangerous factor for the national security of Mexico. For the social and even political disruption in Mexico to subside, a major reduction in the demand for illicit drugs by Americans is necessary. And that is not what has happened.

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<sup>56</sup> See Jorge Chabat (2006).

In this context, it is not only desirable but necessary that the US explicitly recognize that enhancing institutional capacities of Mexico and Central America against drug trafficking and organized crime is vital to preserve its own security. It is important that the recognition come separately and independently from homeland security concerns related to terrorism.

Mexican developmental efforts in Central America along with its own Southern region are part of an unevenly funded strategy called the Plan Puebla Panamá. US developmental presence in Central America through its Agency for International Development, especially in Guatemala, definitely aligns with Mexican efforts, interests, and security. In spite of the abysmal differences in Mexican and American capacities and regional interests, uncoordinated strategies are better than none.

In this dysfunctional North American equation toward Central America, Canada is less visible. Canada's recent security concerns include violence by criminal groups related to gun and drug trafficking. In that sense, it is a shared security concern with Mexico. However, while in Canada street violence is a threat to public safety, in Mexico it is a threat to national security.

Joint Canadian – Mexican cooperation in Central America's development focuses on strengthening the Plan Puebla Panamá, rather than a more significant Canadian development aid strategy for Central America. The regional priority for Canada is the Caribbean (understandably so).

Nonetheless, Canada does make commendable efforts for development in Central America. Those efforts are focused on countries with a reduced number of donors of financial aid. Honduras and Nicaragua, for example, are preferred goals for aid over Guatemala or Belize, by far more relevant to the security of Mexico and North America as a whole.

Americans are increasingly concerned by border violence involving criminal organizations in Mexico. It is of utmost importance that a significant domestic crisis in Mexico with transnational consequences be avoided. Bilateral but also trilateral cooperation among North American partners in this regard is necessary. These efforts should transcend the limited scope of the US homeland security concerns, and should not be diminished in importance by the false assessment that a decrease in drug consumption in the US is a success story. Eventually, Canadian and US coordinated efforts with Mexico in developing and assisting neighboring Central American countries is not only in order, but vital to North American Security.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the following persons for their support, advice, and help during his academic stay in American University, and in the preparation of this essay:

- American University's faculty and staff. Special thanks to Dean Louis Goodman, Ambassador Anthony Quainton, Dr. Robert Pastor, Assistant Dean Maria Green Cowles for her kind and always useful academic advice, and Professor David Bosco, for his friendship and diligent review of this text.
- Canadian officials in Ottawa who were kind enough to talk to the author. His gratitude to Mark Moher, Jennifer Irish, Danielle Ayotte, Vikas Sharma, Michael Walma, Victor Rakmil, Alexandre Léveque, Michael Kaduck, Dianne Staruch (and others whose names might not have been included; an apology for that is offered) from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Canada. Also, Marie Legault and Paul McGinnis, from Canada's International Development Agency.
- Mexican officials and colleagues from the Foreign Service serving in Washington, D.C., and Ottawa. Special thanks to Julián Ventura, Manuel Suárez Mier, Mauricio Ibarra, Octavio Tripp, José Martín García, Enrique Escamilla, Antonio Ortiz Mena, Jorge Cicero, Tonatiuh Romero, Xavier Gurza.
- Mexican officials in the Division and Undersecretariat for North America at the *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* in Mexico City.
- Joseph, as always.

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