

Latino Electorate at 100 Days: Obama Popular, But Want to See Action on Immigration," *Latino Decisions* (blog), May 4, 2009 (<http://latinodecisions.wordpress.com/2009/05/04/the-latino-electorate-at-100-days-obama-popular-but-want-to-see-action-on-immigration>).

32. The fact that Colombia's Constitutional Court in March 2010 finally nixed the reelection of President Uribe for a third term may make it considerably easier for the administration to obtain approval for the Colombia Free Trade Act. See Michael Shifter, "The United States and Colombia: Recalibrating the Relationship" (this volume, chapter 4).

33. The recent formation by thirty-two Latin American and Caribbean nations of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, to include all countries of the Americas except the United States and Canada, could allow those countries disposed to try greater cooperation with the United States to hedge their bets, and to undertake pragmatic cooperation with little political risk.

34. See Daniel P. Erikson, "Obama and the Haitian Earthquake," *FocalPoint: Canada's Spotlight on the Americas* 9, no. 2 ("Focus on Haiti," March 2010): 1 ([www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint\\_march2010.pdf](http://www.focal.ca/pdf/focalpoint_march2010.pdf)), and Juan Gabriel Valdés, "Haiti: Life beyond Survival" (this volume, chapter 9).

35. In Brazil, too, Ambassador Shannon welcomed six U.S. cabinet members to the country between February and April.

36. The pledge made by the United States and other countries at the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank in Cancún in March 2010 to a substantial expansion of capital commitments to the Bank is a step in the right direction, especially as the international financial crisis has greatly tightened private credit and has made the bank much more important again.

37. The May 19, 2010, declaration by the governments of Mexico and the United States outlining a new vision and procedures for border management was an important step in this direction. See "Declaration by the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Mexican States Concerning Twenty-First-Century Border Management" ([www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/May/20100524151635SBlBahC0.1740032.html](http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/May/20100524151635SBlBahC0.1740032.html)).

## two

# Mexico and the United States: The Search for a Strategic Vision

*Carlos Heredia and Andrés Rozental*

As usual, most Mexicans viewed the election of a new U.S. president in 2008 with high expectations. It did not much matter that Mexico had not figured prominently in Barack Obama's electoral campaign, or that he had never set foot on Mexican territory. Mexicans hoped that he would abandon the kind of unilateral exercise of power practiced by the outgoing administration of George W. Bush in violation of bilateral agreements and even international law.

Though domestically driven, three of Obama's campaign promises were in fact highly relevant for Mexico: (1) to submit to Congress a comprehensive reform bill on immigration; (2) to revise the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States, and Canada for the benefit of workers and not just big business; and (3) to improve border cooperation. Furthermore, Obama's twenty-two-hour visit to Mexico City on April 16–17, 2009, served to reaffirm the many ties between the two countries and shifted their focus to "shared responsibility," thus inspiring hopes for a new tone in bilateral relations.

## Obama's Brief Honeymoon

Getting to the White House is far different from exercising power there, however. As the recent debate over health care reform shows, promoting and implementing initiatives is an uphill struggle today because executive authority is very fragmented and American public opinion is polarized on



practically every issue—as is reflected in a much divided Congress. Owing to these circumstances, the enthusiasm Mexicans felt at the start of the “Obama era” has gradually morphed into measured caution.<sup>1</sup>

This shift in Mexico’s attitude has also been fueled by developments in two central areas of mutual concern—security and the economy. On the evening of September 15, 2008, during Independence Day festivities in the city of Morelia, eight people were killed by fragmentary grenades in what Mexico came to see as the first direct attack on a defenseless civilian population by drug gangs. This event led to growing demands for an end to the U.S.-backed “war” on drug-related crime announced by President Felipe Calderón in December 2006, and for a new emphasis on citizen security instead.

Only hours before these killings, the U.S. economy was approaching a turning point: the legendary Wall Street investment bank, Lehman Brothers, had declared bankruptcy, giving rise to America’s biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Just as in 2001, when the United States became focused on the “war on terror” in the wake of 9/11, Mexico was relegated to the sidelines. After the autumn of 2008, the White House and the Congress had to contend with the domestic toxic loans crisis, the bailout of banks and large U.S. conglomerates, and health reform. Internationally, Washington was busy with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the dangerously volatile situation in Pakistan, the complexities of the Middle East situation, nuclear-related skirmishes with Iran and North Korea, and China’s challenge to U.S. leadership in international financial institutions and on climate change. Clearly, the U.S. administration had too much on its plate to pay close attention to its southern neighbor—except for two nagging problems, organized crime and border security.

### **Bilateral Issues and Actors: Toward Shared Responsibility?**

As a result, combating crime and maintaining security have become the central axis of U.S. relations with Mexico, and the U.S. Departments of Defense and Homeland Security are playing an increasingly important role in those relations. For its part, the State Department is facilitating contacts between these agencies and their Mexican counterparts, rather than articulating a comprehensive vision of bilateral relations and a new narrative about a united North America.

On the Mexican side, it took President Calderón three years to schedule a state visit to the United States (on May 19–20, 2010), whereas Mexican presidents of the past fifty years have usually done so during their first year in

office. This delay may reflect the fact that Mexico’s image in the U.S. media has been deteriorating. As Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez describes it,

Behind the diplomatic gala of the Mexican government there is no voice, there are no ideas, there is not even any will. There are porcelain, tablecloths and glasses: this is a glass-tinkling diplomacy. Mexico’s insecurity seeps across the country’s borders. As he realizes Mexico’s image in U.S. public opinion, President Calderón reels out the tired discourse of a “campaign against Mexico.” The president’s diagnosis, and what is worse his strategy, is mistaken. Mexico’s is not a simple image problem. . . . Its domestic problem is real, deep and complex. At this hour, the absence of an imaginative foreign policy is particularly serious. The diplomacy of nationalist lamentation cannot replace the diplomacy of tinkling glasses. We urgently need a lucid and audacious diplomacy that commits our neighbor to resolving a shared problem. Seen from this angle, the fact that the United States worries about our violence could be seen as an encouraging sign. It could be if our foreign policy were self-possessed and lucid.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, civil servants in both countries report increasing levels of interaction, not only in the frequency of high-level bilateral meetings, but also in the contacts between the respective government entities, the opportunities for shared intelligence, and the degree of proximity between the Mexican ambassador and the U.S. president. Yet none of this has led to a more fruitful bilateral relationship because Mexico has no strategic vision of what it wants from Washington, while Washington, which makes Mexico a priority only when it senses a threat to its security, has also failed to forge a shared vision of a future bilateral relationship and regional integration.

### **The Mérida Initiative**

Mexican public opinion has gradually become more open to the possibility of bilateral cooperation to combat drug-trafficking, however. In a 2008 survey undertaken when George W. Bush was still president, 49 percent of respondents supported U.S.-Mexican cooperation in patrolling the border, ports, and airports to combat drug-trafficking (61 percent of “elite” respondents did not). The extradition of criminals to the United States was highly favored by 58 percent of all respondents and 76 percent of elite respondents. Furthermore, 55 percent of all respondents and 70 percent of elite



respondents would welcome financial aid from the United States to combat drug-trafficking and organized crime.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, action on this front was already under way in 2007 with the launching of the Mérida Initiative, a cooperative security program to combat organized crime that includes some Central American and Caribbean countries. The U.S. Congress approved US\$1.35 billion to be spent on it over three years from 2009 onward, to equip Mexico's armed and federal police forces with helicopters and high-tech equipment for port and airport security, to establish communications networks for intelligence agency cooperation, and to provide training in financial intelligence and human rights. The program does not include firearms or cash payments. U.S. forces have been assigned US\$74 million to block illegal arms trafficking from the United States to Mexico, although it is not yet clear what measures this would entail.

Ideally, the Mérida Initiative should commit both neighbors to resolving a shared problem. Interestingly, the language that the U.S. side uses to describe the initiative suggests otherwise: U.S. politicians and diplomats refer to it as "aid," "help," "assistance," and "support," while Mexican civil servants characterize it as "cooperation" or a "shared initiative."

This is not merely a difference in semantics. At least three factors complicate the resolution of the problem as it pertains to the deployment of the armed forces in President Calderón's so-called war against organized crime: (1) Mexico's armed forces are not used to public scrutiny by journalists and domestic and international civil organizations; (2) its soldiers are not trained to do jobs normally carried out by the police; and (3) military officers fear they will be accused of human rights violations and even be placed under arrest by judicial authorities for supposedly taking on functions beyond those sanctioned by law for the military. The Mexican Congress has thus failed to approve reforms to the National Security Law that would provide legal backing for this sort of intervention by the armed forces.

The U.S. State Department insists that there should be a detailed report on the human rights impact of the Mérida Initiative to facilitate congressional approval of the future disbursement of funds for the Mexican government. Mexicans, in turn, argue that reciprocity is essential if the initiative is really to be a cooperative program. Moreover, Mexicans think that the United States must stop hiding behind its Constitution's Second Amendment, on the right to bear arms, and actually cooperate with Mexico in identifying the source of assault weapons bought in U.S. gun shops and weapons fairs that end up in the hands of Mexican drug gangs and organized criminals and whose firepower far exceeds that of the Mexican police.

During a meeting to evaluate the Mérida Initiative in Mexico City on March 23, 2010, both Mexico and the United States admitted they could not win the battle against organized crime on their own and broadened the program to include education and health, as well as economic and social development aid to areas most affected by drug violence. What was left unsaid, however, was that the United States has done little or nothing to reduce the demand for drugs, dismantle distribution networks, or change the laws governing these issues. Many Mexicans wonder why their country should bear the brunt of the battle and be left with the majority of its victims when the country responsible for drug demand does little more than make encouraging speeches and offer a financially paltry cooperation program.

### **The Necessary Immigration Reform**

Another point of bilateral disagreement is the flow of Mexican workers to the United States. Mexico wants the United States to recognize that it needs Mexican labor, which makes a fundamental contribution to the prosperity and competitiveness of various sectors, including agriculture, industry, construction, and hospitality services. According to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, immigrants, many of them Mexican, will account for 100 percent of the growth of the U.S. labor force between 2010 and 2030.

During his electoral campaign, Obama repeatedly complained that the U.S. immigration system was "broken" and notoriously "dysfunctional," promising Latino or Hispanic organizations that he would repair it. This promise had palpable electoral results: 67 percent of Latino voters—citizens of Latin American origin—voted for Obama in 2008, compared with only 57 percent for John Kerry in 2004. The Latino vote was decisive in the defeat of Republicans in disputed states such as Colorado, North Carolina, Florida, Indiana, New Mexico, and Virginia. However, Latinos are still waiting for Obama to fulfill his promise. Most leaders of immigrant organizations believe that U.S. society is in effect telling them, "We need you but we don't want you."<sup>4</sup>

According to U.S. elite opinion, any immigration reform submitted to Congress must meet at least four requirements: (1) provide measures to control borders and entry points to the United States, monitor places of work, and impose sanctions on employers who hire undocumented laborers; (2) regularize the status of undocumented workers already in the United States in accordance with the law mandating they pay a fine and get in line behind all those already waiting to acquire a visa; (3) establish a legal route



for regularized workers to become permanent residents and then citizens of the United States; (4) create a scheme to regulate worker flows, using guest or temporary worker mechanisms.

In early 2010 President Obama reaffirmed his “unwavering” commitment to immigration reform, but to date no proposal has been submitted to Congress, although one is being elaborated by Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.). In December 2009 Luis Gutiérrez, Democratic representative for the Fourth Congressional District of Illinois and of Puerto Rican descent, submitted to Congress the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America’s Security and Prosperity (CIR-ASAP), which, according to the *New York Times*, “has the right ingredients for a comprehensive reform.”<sup>5</sup>

During a massive march on Washington on March 21, 2010, Latin American and other immigrants called on Obama and Congress to ensure that U.S. immigration laws reflect the values of migrant communities in the United States and recognize the degree of economic, political, and social integration they have achieved. Marchers also noted that in contrast to the Schumer-Graham proposal, which considers migrants a burden on the United States, the Gutiérrez bill recognizes the changes that migrant communities deserve and that the country needs.<sup>6</sup>

While the reform has been in the works, more than 600 miles of a physical and virtual wall have been built along the U.S.-Mexican border at a cost of more than US\$2.4 billion since 2005 (its maintenance is expected to cost triple that amount). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), whether the wall has helped stem the tide of illegal immigration is uncertain.<sup>7</sup> Police raids and deportations have continued, turning immigrant workers into a shadowy underclass. As the *New York Times* has remarked, “What’s been happening as the endless wait for reform drags on has been ugly . . . the Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and local law enforcement agencies have set loose an epidemic of misery, racial profiling and needless arrests.”<sup>8</sup>

Although many scholars, analysts, and observers view immigration as an eminently “intermestic” issue—one that combines international and local or domestic elements—most Americans consider it a domestic affair that cannot be negotiated with the governments of other countries. Even if Washington were to issue more visas to Mexican workers, it is not clear what the Mexican government would be willing to offer in return.

Mexico’s constitution guarantees freedom of movement within the national territory, but it also stipulates that “the exercise of that right is subordinated to the powers of the administrative authorities regarding the

limitations imposed by emigration and immigration laws.”<sup>9</sup> If enforced, this disposition would require overland travelers to comply with exactly the same rules that apply to air travelers, channeling them through authorized points of transit. Although most top-level civil servants and legislators do not think this idea is feasible—for it would make undocumented emigration much more difficult and thus shut a key social safety valve—the subject must be open to debate. If Mexico wants an immigration agreement with the United States, the starting point must be the consistent application of its own national law.

### Shared Responsibilities at the Border

Probably no border in the world separates more contrasting societies than the 3,141-kilometer line between Mexico and the United States, running from Tijuana/San Diego in the west to Matamoros/Brownsville in the east. On one side lies a technology- and capital-rich society, on the other a country whose main export is human labor. The difficulties in managing such a border were made clear in an October 2009 report issued under the auspices of the Mexican Council on Foreign Relations (*Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales*, COMEXI) and the California-based Pacific Council on International Policy (PCIP).<sup>10</sup> The only way to handle the border, concluded the report’s thirty contributors, is to base all recommendations on the notion of “shared problems and solutions.”

The report suggests that Mexican agencies in charge of border control be restructured to mirror U.S. border security and protection, customs, and migration agencies. To facilitate border transit and trade, it recommends the development of border infrastructure through investment in public-private associations. The North American Development Bank could be reinforced to promote economic development, in concert with support for education efforts in border communities. Since water is a precious commodity in this arid frontier zone, it could be given special attention by empowering the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) to manage all surface and underground waters and educating the population about its use. In addition, the report suggests environmental regulations should be harmonized in the border region. It also calls for comprehensive migration reform in the United States to deal with the challenge of undocumented migration and for a multidimensional initiative to promote globally sustainable development in Mexico. Both governments have not only promised to assess these recommendations and the feasibility of implementing them, but



have already incorporated some of them in a joint statement on the border released in Washington on May 19, 2010.<sup>11</sup>

### **Multilateral Cooperation: There Is No "M" in "BRIC"**

Since the ratification of NAFTA in December 1993, the United States has lost a great deal of the hegemonic power it acquired after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is due in large part to the emergence of powerful new geopolitical actors and a subsequent shift in the global economy's center of gravity to the Asia Pacific Basin. Nonetheless, the United States offers the greatest hope for the rapid reactivation of consumption and global economic growth, although it admittedly had a large hand in the major financial crisis of 2008–09. At the same time, Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the so-called BRIC countries) are providing daily proof of a new political independence, including a perhaps natural inclination to distance themselves from Washington's foreign policy. With its timid and unfocused foreign policy, Mexico has not yet joined this group of emerging powers.

However, Mexico has held a seat on the UN Security Council in 2002–03 and 2009–10, and in this period two opposing views have emerged regarding its position on the world stage. Some argue that Mexico should make a conscious effort to join the group of middle-range powers. Others claim that this will only foment conflicts with Washington in different world forums, as exemplified by the tensions that arose when the United States invaded Iraq.

At the time of writing, another polarizing conflict is brewing within the United Nations over sanctions against Iran, which the United States supports because it fears Teheran is developing atomic weapons through its uranium-enrichment program. Other permanent members of the Security Council disagree with the U.S. position on this matter. While Mexico voted in favor of sanctions, it must decide whether to maintain this position on an issue that could put it in conflict with Washington. The issue promises to command Mexico's attention throughout its term on the council.

Since the emergence of the G-5 (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa), which served as an interlocutor with the G-8 at the 2007 meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany, Mexico has preferred to be an amiable mediator rather than join with the other members of its group. At the G-20 meeting in 2009, which President Obama called to broaden the debate and search for solutions to the global financial crisis, it was Brazil—not Mexico—that played a key role among the Latin American countries; the same has happened on other occasions, such as the climate summit, the crisis in Honduras, and at

the Ibero-American Conference in May 2010. Mexico has also been a discreet participant in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. In February 2010 Mexico hosted a meeting of Latin American and Caribbean heads of state to establish a new mechanism for regional cooperation and unity among the countries of the continent, excluding the United States and Canada. This initiative seeks to mend Mexico's broken relationships with Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia, among other countries in the region that want to isolate Washington from regional cooperation and further debilitate the Organization of American States (OAS). Mexico should articulate its interests and strategic goals clearly and seek a flexible approach to international relations that is consistent with those interests and goals.

### **The North American Integration Process: No Constituency, No Future**

Since the signing of NAFTA, Mexico has seen quite a significant increase in foreign direct investment and in the volume of trade with the United States and Canada. Indeed, many Mexicans regard the trade agreement as a point of arrival—a way to get into the "major leagues" and establish closer ties with and gain market access to the United States, rather than as a point of departure to increase the strengths of the Mexican economy. As various authors have pointed out, the lesson Mexico has yet to learn is that growing trade and foreign investment do not in themselves lead to dynamic economic development.<sup>12</sup>

In the years under NAFTA, Mexico's average annual per capita GDP has grown just over 1 percent, a rate far below that necessary to generate the employment required to absorb the growth of the workforce. This low rate is a result of structural problems such as fiscal rigidity, low levels of infrastructural investment, an outdated and inefficient education system, and strong monopolistic practices in markets for open and paid television, fixed and mobile telephones, soft drinks, land transport, cement, and banking, among others.

Paradoxically, the performance of the manufacturing sector, which should be the engine of regional integration, has deteriorated since 2001. The Mexican economy follows the U.S. manufacturing industry cycle; since the United States absorbs more than 80 percent of Mexican exports, any contraction in U.S. industrial production immediately and directly affects the Mexican economy. If anything, regional integration in key areas, including manufacturing, has regressed. Instead of consolidating productive regional chains and



transforming them into a productive platform for the North American region, Mexico has become an importer of Asian goods. Although it has a trade surplus with the United States, mirroring this is a growing commercial deficit with the rest of the world, mainly with China and other countries of East Asia.

Today "North America" has no leader championing it, no enthusiastic proponent with a vision of its future. The citizenry of the three NAFTA countries believe the trade agreement has benefited the other partners more than their own country, which is not very propitious for a deepening of trilateral economic integration. Yet both Canada and Mexico have mainly sought to consolidate bilateral ties with the United States rather than push for greater integration among all three, while President Obama has not reiterated his criticism of NAFTA on the campaign trail.

However, the president's trade representative, Ron Kirk, recently announced that the administration is planning to negotiate a "new kind of trade agreement for the twenty-first century." Titled the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), it is expected to strengthen environmental protection, transparency, labor rights, and development and thereby "serve as a model for the future of U.S. foreign trade."<sup>13</sup> By contrast, NAFTA was conceived for another era and is completely out of sync with the principles of a new-generation treaty.

### **Future Prospects: A North American Policy for Mexican Development**

A central problem for North America is the development gap between Mexico and its trade partners. Whereas Canada and the United States have a per capita annual income of more than US\$40,000, the figure for Mexico is a mere US\$9,000.

In view of their respective strengths, however, Mexico and the United States could join forces to build a new manufacturing platform and regional labor market. With its relatively young population, highly qualified workforce for manufacturing production, and enviable geographical position, Mexico offers an ideal logistical platform. Meanwhile, U.S. assets—its constant technological innovation; broad range of services in finance, engineering, design, brands, and marketing; and most vigorous market in the world—are essential in a postmaterial, knowledge-based economy.

North America's three leaders—Prime Minister Stephen Harper, President Barack Obama, and President Felipe Calderón—should jointly review trends in regional economic integration, demography, and workforce

education to build a shared future that takes advantage of their economic interdependences, synergies, and complementarities. They should ensure the safe and efficient circulation of people along the breadth and width of Canada, the United States, and Mexico with a view to making North America more competitive vis-à-vis other regions and other integrated markets.

### **A Mexican Lobby in the United States**

Of the 45 million Latinos living in the United States, 31 million are Mexican or of Mexican descent: 19 million were born in the United States and 12 million in Mexico. At least 11 percent of the Mexican population lives in the United States. Theoretically, the best allies of the Mexican cause in the United States are Mexican Americans; but they rightly resist being used as a conveyor belt of the Mexican government's agenda. "It now turns out that the country that forced me to leave is making demands on me," complains Antonia Hernández, a prominent former leader of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). "We feel loyalty to our families, and we are proud of the history, culture, music, food of Mexico, which is also ours; but they cannot demand our loyalty toward their government or political parties, because they have done very little to create the conditions for a dignified life for their own people."<sup>14</sup>

According to *The Economist*, "It is best for Mexicans to stay quiet and not get involved" in the U.S. political process.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, the Mexican government instructs its civil servants and diplomats to abstain from commenting on the legislative process of its neighbor. But high-level members of the Obama administration have claimed on various occasions that Mexicans are welcome to defend their point of view, underlining that this is not only appropriate but also necessary since Americans still know so little about Mexico. Mexicans can and must promote an intelligent, forward-looking vision of integration between both societies. Failing to do so would be tantamount to passively accepting the ideas propounded by racists and xenophobes.

### **Preparing for the Future**

For the benefit of both parties, the United States and Mexico could translate their shared responsibility into bilateral agreements along the following lines:

1. Mexico should become a manufacturing platform and logistical distribution center connecting all parts of the hemisphere. It is ideally situated to



be the axis of an interoceanic system for the transport of containers between, say, Hong Kong and Houston. This role, already envisioned by North America's SuperCorridor Coalition, Inc., should become a strategic goal of Mexico's Communications and Transport Secretariat.<sup>16</sup>

2. By definition, immigration is a bilateral issue. Yet the United States is reluctant to admit it needs Mexican workers, while Mexico expels migrants and treats them as a "residual" population. Since Mexico will be involved in any solution, the Mexican Congress must call for quid pro quo measures in the reform of U.S. immigration law. But it must also change its own immigration legislation to ensure that what Mexico demands from the United States is consistent with its treatment of Central American and other migrants who are passing through Mexico en route to the United States.

3. The border should be managed in a coordinated manner by a binational authority. U.S. Homeland Security and Mexico's Secretariat must jointly define and coordinate tasks regarding border crossings, infrastructure works, and law enforcement agencies.

4. To foster a better relationship, Mexico and the United States must not only aim for mutual respect and better mutual knowledge but should also strive to identify shared interests. It is hard to believe that South Korea, which has half of Mexico's population and lies more than 9,000 kilometers away, has 60,000 students in U.S. programs of higher education compared with Mexico's 12,000. A first step should be to establish a broad, consolidated program offering student grants and exchanges. It could be launched by the Public Education Secretariat and the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior*, ANUIES) to permit U.S. candidates, particularly Mexican Americans, to study in Mexico, and to ensure that a higher number of Mexicans do so in the United States.

The United States is the only major economic power without a development policy for its less-developed neighboring countries. In contrast, the European Union has mobilized structural funds for regional development and economic and social cohesion in Spain, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal, and it is now doing the same for the countries of Eastern Europe. Japan has established similar programs for its neighbors in South and Southeast Asia.

Mexico must adopt the objective of developing a broad middle class, a goal that would be in tune with U.S. strategic interests: this would expand markets and promote economic and political stability south of the border. As President George W. Bush put it, "We must work with Mexico to develop a middle class in the long run, so people can do their duty as a parent at

home."<sup>17</sup> The U.S., Mexican, and Canadian governments should consider creating a trilaterally funded North American Development Fund to promote convergent regional economic development.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, increasing violence in cities near the U.S. border such as Ciudad Juárez, Reynosa, and Monterrey has led the United States to issue "travel alerts" that merely augment widespread fear of what is happening south of the border. Instead of encouraging people to think of Mexico as a business partner or a strategic ally, such measures make one wonder whether the United States will eventually try to seal the border entirely to protect itself from the growing wave of violence and crime on the Mexican side.

History teaches that citizens will forgive the mistakes of politicians and endure hard times as long as they are sure their government is on their side. If this applies to foreign governments as well, it is hard to imagine that Mexico will ever have as receptive a figure across the border as President Obama, which is all the more reason not to let this window of opportunity for improved relations close.

At the same time, Mexico must recognize that it will be relevant to the world's greatest power only to the degree that it accepts its responsibilities and understands that the key to a strong economy is a broad and vibrant middle class. Hence no international cooperation scheme can replace a national development policy that empowers state and society to build the physical, social, and institutional infrastructure required for economic growth. The three fundamental pillars of such a policy must be improved public education, economic competitiveness, and a sound strategy for industrial development.<sup>19</sup> This could significantly transform the way in which Mexico is perceived, not only in the United States but the world over.

## Notes

1. The hope of reviving agreements such as the "Spirit of Houston" between presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari and George H. W. Bush or the "San Cristóbal accords" between presidents Vicente Fox and George W. Bush was rapidly eclipsed by the differences and tensions in bilateral relations.

2. Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez, "La diplomacia de brindis" (The diplomacy of toasting), *Reforma*, March 16, 2009.

3. See "México y el mundo: opinión pública y política exterior" (Mexico and the world: public opinion and foreign policy), a survey undertaken by the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE), Mexico, DF ([www.mexicoyelmundo.cide.edu](http://www.mexicoyelmundo.cide.edu)).



4. Oscar Chacón, leader of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC), interview with Carlos Heredia, Mexico City, March 10, 2010.

5. "Reform, on Ice," *New York Times*, March 2, 2010. The bill became U.S. House Resolution 4321.

6. NALACC Press communiqué ([www.nalacc.org](http://www.nalacc.org)).

7. Daniel B. Word, "Billions for a U.S.-Mexico Border Fence, but Is It Doing Any Good?" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 19, 2009.

8. "Reform, on Ice."

9. Article 11 of the Mexican constitution.

10. *Una nueva visión de la frontera México-Estados Unidos: soluciones conjuntas a problemas comunes* (A new vision of the Mexico-U.S. border: Joint solutions to common problems), October 13, 2009 ([www.consejomexicano.org](http://www.consejomexicano.org)).

11. See "Declaration by the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Mexican States Concerning Twenty-First Century Border Management," May 19, 2010 ([www.america.gov](http://www.america.gov)).

12. Kevin P. Gallagher, Enrique Dussel Peters, and Timothy A. Wise, eds., *The Future of North American Trade Policy: Lessons from NAFTA*, Pardee Center Task Force Report 1 (Boston University, November 2009).

13. Ibid.

14. Antonia Hernández, conversation with Carlos Heredia, February 2009.

15. "Gently Does It: Mexico's Complex Relationship with America," *The Economist*, December 3, 2009.

16. The North American Transport and Trade Super Corridor should link central Northern America from the Lázaro Cárdenas Port in Michoacán (the doorway to the Asian-Pacific Basin) to the city of Winnipeg in the middle of the trans-Canadian highway, passing through Kansas City, Missouri, in the U.S. heartland ([www.nasco.com](http://www.nasco.com)).

17. Dow Jones Newswires, August 7, 2004.

18. Robert A. Pastor and others, "The Paramount Challenge for North America: Closing the Development Gap" ([www.american.edu/ia/cnas/pdfs/NADBank.pdf](http://www.american.edu/ia/cnas/pdfs/NADBank.pdf)).

19. In a February 19, 2010, report on his visit to Mexico, Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, UN special rapporteur on the right to education, noted that the Public Education Secretariat remains "subordinated" to the teachers' union headed by Elba Esther Gordillo, which "obstructs" educational advancement in Mexico. To illustrate the economic stresses, on April 5, 2010, President Calderón presented a reform bill to Congress seeking to expand the powers of the Federal Competition Commission to sanction monopolistic practices.

## three Obama and Brazil

João Augusto de Castro Neves and Matias Spektor

When Barack Obama met Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for the first time in March 2009, his tone was deferential. Not unlike his predecessor, Obama praised the "progressive, forward-looking leadership" qualities of his Brazilian counterpart and underlined the importance of Brazil's increasing role in global affairs.<sup>1</sup> However, there was not much to the meeting beyond the flattery. Except for discussing the difficulties in expanding cooperation on biofuels, the two presidents paid almost no attention to issues in which both countries play a relevant role, such as international trade, the environment, nuclear proliferation, and the global financial architecture. Since then, relations between Brazil and the United States have been marked by considerable friction and relative distance.

That is not to say that their relationship has negative undertones. Quite the opposite. Since 2000 it has been fairly positive. Nevertheless, since the end of the cold war Brazil has shown less enthusiasm toward engagement with the United States than have countries like Argentina, Chile, or Mexico. For Brazil, the moments of close alignment have been uncommon, while the overall attitude of the United States may be described as one of benign indifference.<sup>2</sup> Not even the good personal relationship between presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Bill Clinton and between presidents Lula and George W. Bush were enough to alter that scenario. All in all, the numerous high-level meetings and memoranda of understanding between the two countries have amounted to a respectful, yet almost stale bilateral relationship. After the failed attempts to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas