

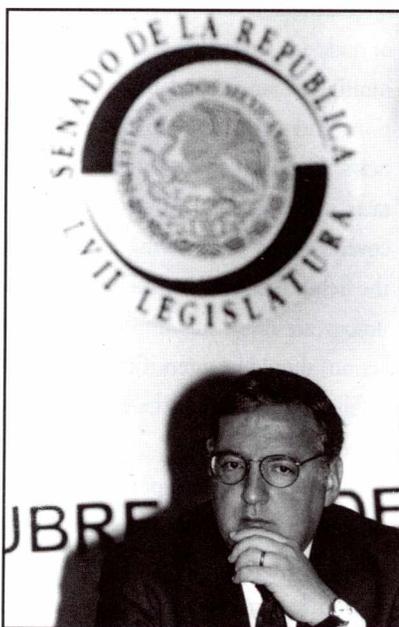
Mexico and United States At the End of the Millenium¹

*Jesús Reyes Heroles G.G.**

Bilateral relations with the United States are central in the strategy of Mexico's foreign policy. The United States is a determining factor in Mexico's development, since it shares our country's most important border, because of the size of its population and economy, as well as due to its specific weight in the family of nations.

Mexico's relations with the United States are among the most diverse, intense and complex in the world. For Mexico, the asymmetry of resources with its neighbor poses a double challenge. On the one hand, commercial, political and cultural ties should be strengthened to Mexicans' advantage; on the other hand, sovereignty must be maintained within this context of interdependency. Therefore, Mexico's main challenge in the field of foreign policy remains the defense of its sovereignty in an international panorama that has substantially changed in recent years.

Mexican efforts to achieve a stable and beneficial relationship center on



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Ambassador Jesús Reyes Heroles.

Mexico's adherence to the fundamental principles that are the basis for the conceptual framework of Mexico's foreign policy: the right of nations to self-determination, non-intervention, the peaceful solution to controversies, barring the threat or use of force in international relations, legal equality between states, international cooperation for development and the struggle for peace and international security.

These principles, enshrined in the Constitution, are the defining points of a state's true foreign policy and reflect the spirit of respect and dignity that is a constant in Mexico's history of international relations. During the country's almost two centuries of independence, such illustrious Mexicans as Benito Juárez, Venustiano Carranza, Genaro Estrada and Lázaro Cárdenas, just to mention a few, have reaffirmed Mexico's foreign policy with their doctrines and their actions.

MEXICO-U.S. POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Five central characteristics can be pinpointed in the political relations between Mexico and the United States. First, ours is an indissoluble relationship; being neighbors is the dominant element. The second determining aspect is the existence of major differences between the living standards of the inhabitants of the two countries, an asymmetry that is one of the main challenges to be tackled. In third place, a history

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Translated by Peter Gellert.

full of vicissitudes marks the relations between the two peoples, whose cultures are very different. Fourth, we occupy adjoining areas in the region—North America—, where for reasons related to markets, cultures, demographics and tradition, migration flows are continual, within each of the three countries and among them. In fifth place, the relationship is based on an agenda encompassing multiple themes, which in turn reflect practically all aspects of the internal life of the two countries.

Three hundred ninety million people live in the three countries of North America; the region is the world's largest market, with 8.6 trillion dollars in 1996 gross domestic product; trade between the three countries is growing rapidly. The region's financial markets are an example of one of the world's most thorough integration processes. Some of the world's most massive and transcendental migratory movements can be observed among the three countries and the territories they cover.

Perhaps what makes North America's reality more complex is that, unlike any other neighboring countries, three countries coexist within this region with enormous differences in the living standards of their inhabitants. Per capita income in Canada is five times greater than in Mexico; in the case of the United States, the difference is six-fold. The implications of these differences in terms of basic services, schooling, health and welfare, among other aspects, are immediate and have major effects.

With the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the three countries have decided, despite

the complexity of these differences, to initiate a course of action of great scope and vision for the region's future development.

It is important to mention that parallel to and coexisting with the enormous mutual benefits in the relations between Mexico and the United States is an unbalanced and even distorted appreciation concerning the characteristics of the other country.

In general, attention is focused on the most conflictive issues, for example, drug trafficking and immigration. The unquestionable achievements in the fields of trade and investment are slighted. The multiple financial and business associations and operations do not make the news. Cooperation and intensified contacts in the cultural world receive scant coverage, and the growing exchanges in the fields of education, science and technology are rarely mentioned. Therefore, actions should be intensified to make the public's perception of the bilateral agenda realistic.

One of the most important aspects of bilateral relations concerns energy resources. The United States is the world's second largest natural gas and coal-producing country. It produces 11 percent of the world's crude, but consumes 25 percent of total oil production.

Perhaps as a result of this imbalance, for several years now, different sectors in the United States have requested that Mexico open up oil exploration, production and refining. The Mexican government's response has always been clear and forceful: the Constitution grants the state exclusive rights in these strategic areas and in this field no modifications will be introduced to its article 27.

MECHANISMS OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

To deal with the issues that arise from this intense and complex relationship, different policies and diplomatic courses of action have been employed over the years. Among them are the Bilateral Commission, which has met periodically since 1993; NAFTA, which since 1994 is the main framework for establishing the standards regulating commercial and investment relations between the two countries; the interparliamentary meetings, whose characteristics and organization have been evolving as mutual comprehension between the two legislative powers with respect to the strengths, interests and representativity of their counterpart matures.

In addition to these diplomatic channels, it is also worthwhile to consider other areas of cooperation independently.

Education. The multiplication of exchanges and programs in this field is of great value in bettering understanding between the two nations. In recent years, cooperation programs between the two countries' educational systems have been reconsidered, and new programs have been established in the fields of information and technology, education for migrant workers, special education, bilingual education, schooling via radio and television, vocational education, and finally, cooperation in educational statistics. These programs will have to be intensified in coming years; they are of invaluable benefit in the long term.

Disseminating Mexican culture abroad. In its artistic, historical, anthropologi-

cal and literary aspects, among others. To disseminate the culture of Mexico in the United States is a priority instrument for achieving a better knowledge of both countries' idiosyncrasies. From this flows the value of the 20 cultural centers and institutions that operate in the United States, whose activities should be increased among the Hispanic community, U.S. citizens and the media.

Hispanic community. In the third place, it would be worthwhile to briefly review the activities designed to increase the close ties and trust in relations with the Hispanic community in the United States, particularly among those of Mexican origin, as a factor that contributes to achieving other objectives in the country's foreign policy. The Hispanic community is made up of almost 27 million people, 10 percent of the total U.S. population; it is estimated that the

Hispanic population will reach 32 million by the year 2025. In addition, this community has been boosting its political influence. At present, three Hispanics belong to the presidential cabinet, and there are 17 Hispanic congressmen and 5,400 elected officials on a state, local and municipal level. More than 800 political organizations operate in the Hispanic community.

The key challenge is to promote existing programs with a more intense and regular presence of Mexicans, both from the public sector and individuals, in the activities organized by the communities of Mexican origin. It is essential to consolidate and update a data bank with information concerning the principal Mexican and Hispanic organizations.

Administration of justice. These fields of cooperation are accompanied by other issues where conflicts have been present,

and should now be turned into areas of cooperation and understanding. The new face of crime in both nations has sparked differences: arms trafficking, the trafficking in people, the drug trade and related crimes, such as money laundering, are transnational in scope. As a result, cooperation in legal affairs and administration of justice is a field of the utmost importance.

Drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is one of organized crime's most damaging activities, for both public health and government institutions. On the one hand, it is necessary to generalize the recognition that drug trafficking responds to the existence of a corresponding demand. After a long period in which Mexico has been sustaining this view in different forums, in May, President Clinton recognized for the first time that the United States, with five percent of the world's population, consumes 50



José Murat, Ambassador Jesús Reyes Heróles and Israel Soberanis giving a press conference.

percent of the drugs used worldwide. On the other hand, it is also essential to undertake actions against supply. Mexico has been particularly energetic on this flank, since it fights against the cultivation, processing, shipping and introduction of drugs, both into Mexico as well as other countries.

Therefore, Mexico does not accept that, in the context of multilateral relations where as a result of an individual initiative the efforts of several countries come together in the fight against drug trafficking, any particular country attempting to assess, much less certify, actions whose evaluation corresponds exclusively to each sovereign nation.

Migration. On this issue it is essential to reiterate the explanations concerning its principal causes, including its demographic and manpower-related origins, its deep historical and cultural roots, as well as its connection with the tremendous asymmetry between family incomes in the two economies. Even though the United States has the right to adopt its own internal decisions aimed at controlling immigration, clearly the operations derived from new dispositions have multiplied and exacerbated both frictions on this issue and human rights violations.

The anti-immigrant wave of sentiment has fed on fears—very often exaggerated by certain interest groups—that dwell on the negative consequences of immigration without taking into account the enormous contribution it makes to the U.S. economy.

The Mexican government, its legislative branch, non-governmental organizations and the political parties, should together wage an intense communications effort to diminish fears surround-

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ing the issue and seek just treatment for those men and women whose only aim is to improve their standard of living and offer their families a more promising future.

PERSPECTIVES AND WORK PROGRAM
OF THE MEXICAN EMBASSY
IN THE UNITED STATES

Given the complexity of bilateral relations, the Mexican Embassy faces enormous challenges. Firstly, it is essential to improve communication with the U.S. Congress and executive branch. Different existing channels and working groups have demonstrated their usefulness in finding solutions to common problems and formulating projects that translate into benefits for both countries. Adherence to the law and the principles of Mexican foreign policy will continue being the mainstay of such diplomatic actions.

For Mexico to have an appropriate presence in the United States requires the

maximum utilization of its consulates. Based on an increasing and more effective coordination around common objectives, the activities of consular officials will be valuable instruments for Mexico's diplomatic activity in our neighboring country.

In addition to these activities, we must add new orientations and programs for Mexican cultural institutes, which will allow them to become more active centers for thinking about Mexico, promoting our cultural values, and publicizing our contemporary situation.

It is also essential to intensify informational tasks and dialogue with the media and non-governmental organizations, so that the public can understand more precisely the complexity and diversity of the bilateral agenda, with a greater balance between accomplishments and frictions.

The work will be conducted in agreement with the political orientations contained in the National Development Plan and the Foreign Policy Program. The daily activities will strictly comply with the principles of Mexican foreign policy, as stipulated in the Constitution. The daily tasks will always be undertaken based on the motivation of helping to achieve our country's highest aims. In this honorable task, we will never lose sight of our central objective of building a fairer and freer nation, a more democratic, sovereign and prosperous Mexico. **MM**

NOTES

¹Synthesis of the testimony presented by Jesús Reyes Heróles G.G., Mexican ambassador to the United States, before the Foreign Relations Commission of the Mexican Senate, October 23, 1997.