

Mexico and the World Alliance Against Terrorism

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Courtesy of the President of Mexico's Press Office

President Fox offered Mexico's unconditional support to the U.S. government in the fight against terrorism.

Mexico is one of the world's most demilitarized countries; its foreign policy is based on non-intervention and the peaceful solution of controversies. Since World War II, its armed forces have not been deployed militarily abroad, and it has no Islamic-Arab population of importance.

All this means that Mexico has kept its distance from the tensions caused by the attacks on New York's Twin Towers

and the Pentagon in Washington. However, the attacks by modern extremist Islamic terrorists have certain characteristics that do affect Mexico.

How Does Terrorism Affect Mexico?

1. Many Mexicans died in the Twin Towers. Most were cleaning staff, one of the main occupations of Mexicans who live in the Big Apple.
2. Mexico is a strategic-trade ally of the United States; it has signed the North American Free Trade Agreement

(NAFTA) that has increased trade between the two countries since it came into effect in 1994.

3. Mexico is the southern border of a country under threat. For that reason it can be used as a jumping-off place for terrorist cells entering into the United States. We must take into account that the border is more than 2,000 kilometers long and easy to cross illegally.
4. A great many U.S. citizens live in Mexico and many multinational com-

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- panies that could be terrorist targets have offices here.
5. Our two presidents, George Bush and Vicente Fox, are close friends. The very week before the attack our two governments signed a great many accords, many of them to increase cooperation in security matters.
 6. When U.S. security has been seriously threatened, particularly during World War II and during the 1960s missiles crisis, Mexico has supported its northern neighbor unconditionally.
 7. Mexico is an important supplier of energy to the United States, both in the form of oil and electricity. One of the possible targets, if hostilities break out, could be our oil fields.
 8. Mexico has a large amount of air traffic with the United States, mainly commercial flights. The two companies involved in the September 11 attack, American Airlines and United Airlines, operate a large number of flights between Mexico and the United States.
 9. Mexico is the bridge between Central America and the United States, where borders are very vulnerable.

For all of these reasons, while Mexico is not the immediate main target of international terrorism, it could be the object of attacks on buildings, individuals or airlines linked to the United States, or even on Mexican citizens because it is considered a U.S. ally.

These reasons force Mexico, in defense of its own national interests, its sovereignty and its people, to support the United States. Another fundamental factor is that, for reasons of principle, Mexico has internationally put forward the idea of the need for a system of relations among states based

on cooperation to allow for free trade and our country's fundamental values, such as individual freedoms, a democratic form of government, the respect for human rights and for national sovereignty and the defense of citizens' lives. The terrorist attacks threaten these principles. Many Mexicans are in danger because they live in the United States; and many Mexican interests could be the target of terrorist attacks if the war escalates.

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Another fundamental factor that obliges Mexico to support U.S. efforts is that the Islamic fundamentalist war uses terrorism. Terrorists do not distinguish among nationalities or borders and, therefore, in geopolitical terms, Mexico is a vulnerable part of the U.S. system of alliances for fighting terrorism.

LIMITS OF MEXICO'S WAR AGAINST TERRORISM?

Mexico has limited resources for backing the United States. To support the World Antiterrorist Alliance, Mexico does not have armed forces capable of collaborating in the kind of fighting that will be carried out against the Al-

Qaeda guerrillas in the mountains of Afghanistan or in attacks against Afghanistan or other countries. Mexico's armed forces are defensive and do not have high-tech weapons. For that reason, its participation is circumscribed to the framework of cooperation in the Western Hemisphere in avoiding the entry of terrorist commandos into any country, including the U.S., or their attacking any objective in the United States.

Another means of support is putting Mexico's national security system on alert against terrorism. The danger in this is that the human rights of uninvolved persons may be violated for the simple reason that they are of Arab origin or believers in Islam, and an over-surveillance of borders, installations, etc., could force us to concentrate all efforts against terrorism and to disregard other threats like organized crime and drug traffickers.

One of the most important forms of support is Mexico's becoming part of the international diplomatic efforts to detect and isolate terrorism. Mexico proposed September 7, 2001, that the Organization of American States revise the Interamerican Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Mexico is going to host the 2002 Conference on Hemispheric Security and will also be an important presence in the UN Security Council. In addition, humanitarian aid efforts are going to be needed if the military actions are of a type that affect the civilian population.

One of the most important obstacles in the path of full collaboration with the United States is political and historical: the history of Mexico losing territory to the U.S. in 1848 and the existence of nationalist political forces in our country who oppose the admin-

istration giving any kind of support to the United States (this is the case of some sectors of the party that governed Mexico for 71 years, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, and, on the left, the Party of the Democratic Revolution). We should remember that foreign and defense policies are decided by the president, but must be consulted with Congress, mainly the Senate. And President Vicente Fox does not have a majority in the Congress.

FROM TRADE PARTNER TO STRATEGIC ALLY

Mexico finds itself in an existential dilemma in strategic terms: in addition to being the United States' trade partner, is it also going to be its strategic ally?

Since NAFTA came into effect, the United States and Canada have been talking about the need to move on to strategic commitments in security and defense. In Mexico, there is a great deal of resistance to this by people who hold that the United States has ambi-

tions as an empire and that national sovereignty and the independence of the armed forces should be guaranteed.

With the terrorist attacks, the pressure is on again, but this time in a different context: the United States was attacked and is asking its partners for substantial back-up. From the point of view of Mexican interests, the president, through Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda, has expressed his complete backing, but a refusal to give military support. One of Mexico's doubts is the form the U.S. response attack will take. Mexico's concern is that a great humanitarian catastrophe may occur.

CONCLUSION UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT, BETWEEN SOVEREIGNTY AND CAUTION

All the countries of Europe have expressed almost total support for the United States, as have Russia, Pakistan and India. In the United States it is difficult to understand why Mexico does not express similar solidarity. There

are two reasons: if very heavy fighting breaks out and strategic weapons are used, the terrorist response could involve chemical or biological weapons, which people fear that Osama bin Laden has. Mexican territory could be used, and this is a great concern for the public.

Another factor is that the war against terrorism will be prolonged and will employ both conventional military means and non-conventional ones. A protracted war against terrorism is coming that will include responses from Islamic groups. This will force the Mexican government to express two contradictory positions: solidarity with the United States and the defense of Mexican interests. A difficult combination in times of war.

A new kind of war is coming. A great empire, the United States, faces a non-conventional enemy that uses religion and kamikazes who recognize no territorial or humanitarian limits. The world has never seen a war like this. It is a challenge for all countries, including Mexico. ■■

