

# Interview with Anthony Wayne, U.S. Ambassador in Mexico Mexico-U.S. Relations Today<sup>1</sup>

Leonardo Curzio\*

**Leonardo Curzio (LC):** It's an honor to talk with Anthony Wayne, the U.S. ambassador, on a special day for his country [July 4], since of all the foreigners residing in Mexico, the largest community is that of U.S. Americans.

**Ambassador Anthony Wayne (AAW):** It's one of the largest communities in the world: more than one million Americans live in Mexico alone.

**LC:** During his visit last May, President Barack Obama noted that 10 percent of the U.S. population is of Mexican origin. Why do we not recognize each other as next-door neighbors if we have these demographic links?

**AAW:** More than 30 million Americans have Mexican ancestry, and that community continues to grow. In my youth, for example, I noticed that in California there was a large Chicano population—that was what they were called then—and almost 20 percent of my friends in high school belonged to that social group, although the proportion of Chicanos has increased in those communities.

**LC:** Also, millions of citizens have two passports and both nationalities. Plus, the possibility of immigration reform is opening up. Do you think this will bring the Mexican-American community and the two countries in general closer?

**AAW:** We hope so. President Obama's aim is to propose a comprehensive immigration reform that will respect our history as a nation of laws forged in diversity. An important step was the Senate's passage of the bill, and now it has to be discussed in the House of Representatives.

**LC:** We've been waiting for more than 10 years for a solution to the status of that whole community that has lived in the United States, many of them undocumented. Mr. Am-



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bassador, in recent months, two very important books about our bilateral relations have come out. One is *Mexico Matters*, by Luis Rubio,<sup>2</sup> and the other, *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead*, by Shannon K. O'Neil.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Mexico's most important international relationship is the one with the United States, since it is a world power. On the other hand, few countries have as much influence on what happens to millions of Americans as Mexico does. What is your evaluation of current bilateral relations?

**AAW:** The United States is a great country and the relationship with Mexico is very important. That was clear on President Obama's visit May 2 and 3, in the conversations he had with President Enrique Peña Nieto, and the agreements

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and projects assigned to me and my colleagues at Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations.

For example, the importance of the economic and trade relationship was underlined; a new high-level forum for dialogue was created to increase both countries' competitiveness in the world and create jobs; a bi-national forum on education and research was created to increase academic exchange. All this was in recognition of the fact that in recent decades, the relationship between our countries has grown and academic exchange has such great importance for the future that we have to invest in it. We also have to make the border efficient so that young people, both from the U.S. and Mexico, can get to know their neighboring country and stay there three months, six months, or even a few years.

**LC:** Because of its importance, education is the subject of many bills; among others, the one about the 100 000, the "Dreamers," etc., who make it possible to find many points of proximity between the two countries. Our nations' political calendars mean that new administrations coincide every 12 years. I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing. So, that happened with Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and George H. W. Bush; with Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and George W. Bush. Barack Obama was re-elected in November 2012 and this coincides with Enrique Peña Nieto. Do you think there's new impetus when a new administration—in the case of Mexico—and Obama's second term both start?

**AAW:** I have noted energy on both sides of the border. In Mexico, President Peña has indicated that relations with the rest of North America (the United States and Canada) are very important for Mexico's economic future, and the interesting thing is that President Obama has also reformulated these same issues. There's a new vision of the participation of the three countries in the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP) negotiations. We value the importance of working together to improve our competitiveness in the world, and think that the supply lines among Canada, the United States, and Mexico are important for our countries' present and the future, even though we also know that we have to improve the situation, since these lines must be transformed to foster innovation and the creation of new possibilities.

**LC:** The agenda for economic competitiveness is very important. We know that bilateral trade in our region is over US\$400 billion. It seems incredible that we trade more than US\$1 billion every day in goods and services. On the U.S. side, the aim of giving competitiveness more political weight is expressed in the fact that Vice President Joseph Biden him-

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self will preside over the mechanism. The Mexican government has not yet determined who will join him as co-head, but, what can we expect from this high-level economic dialogue?

**AAW:** We hope to organize a meeting this year, and we'll work to determine an agenda with Mexico. It's our aim, for example, to improve the flow across the border; a lot of trade crosses every day, but it can be improved and for that, we need new infrastructure.

**LC:** Are we talking about technology?

**AAW:** Yes, technology. Certain customs processes can facilitate legitimate, legal trade. At the same time, we can improve the detection of illicit trade and that way foster economic growth and achieve greater competitiveness. We're going to examine all the sectors that can connect the two economies: both countries' land and air transportation, telecommunications, and energy grids, like electricity or natural gas networks.

**LC:** Speaking of electricity, there's an idea to foster a project to unify the entire hemisphere—I don't know if in 2020 or 2030—, isn't that right?

**AAW:** Exactly. There's a project to connect all the economies of the Americas because, for example, the price of electricity in Central America is much higher than in Mexico, the United States, Canada, or Colombia. So, we can support economic development in those countries with electricity grids linking them to the South and the North. We can also reinforce energy security and electricity supply on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border with better connections when there are emergencies, etc.

**LC:** So, in the economic dialogue, our aim is that North America be the most competitive region in the world. Is there a date for the meeting of North American leaders?

**AAW:** This year Mexico is the host. Last year it took place in Washington, and I had the opportunity of participating. But I still don't know when it's going to be held.

**LC:** Whenever it is, the presidents will look at the issue of productivity in the region, that is, how to do more things with new technologies. President Obama's speech at the Anthropology Museum gave a lot of food for thought when he

mentioned new forms of energy.<sup>4</sup> The United States has begun a project that sparks a lot of enthusiasm because it points to sustainability by using these forms of energy. Is this issue important in the bilateral dialogue?

**AAW:** We have good collaboration on issues of clean energy; we've built a green economy, and that is predicted to continue five or six more years. Our experts will continue investigating together to share best practices so both economies can become even greener, and that's a very good attitude on our part. USAID works with the ministers of energy and the environment.

**LC:** Let's clear up one point: in 2000 we signed the last border treaty to be certain about where the dividing line between our countries is in the Gulf of Mexico, and one point was left pending about transborder deposits. Has that been completely resolved, Mr. Ambassador?

**AAW:** Last year our two governments signed an agreement to design the protocols for the border in the Gulf of Mexico. Our House of Representatives just approved that project and now the Senate has to review it. First it will go to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and we hope the legislators act swiftly because this is an important accord for developing this area of the Gulf, which can generate resources for both our countries.

**LC:** The two countries are both going to the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPP) negotiations, which should strengthen the instrument we now have, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). But in the Atlantic trade negotiations, before President Obama took office, the United States decided to go to TPP alone and not include Mexico.

**AAW:** The TPP is a negotiation among Australia, Chile, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, the United States, and Mexico, and the idea is, first of all, to successfully concretize the negotiations this year so we can establish higher standards than NAFTA's —because NAFTA was designed 20 years ago— and open up markets in Asia, which are very important to us. It should be pointed out that Mexico has had an agreement with Europe since 2000, and

Canada is a few meters away from finishing its negotiations with the European Union. We are preparing to enter negotiations this year. Several very complex issues between us and the European Union in terms of regulatory standards, particularly in agriculture, need to be explored. Nevertheless, we clearly coincide on the aim of not allowing the supply networks, the supply chains, and the flow among Mexico, the United States, and Canada to lose importance.

**LC:** We may have assumed that NAFTA was leading directly to TAFTA (as the North Atlantic Treaty was dubbed), but it didn't. Just a couple of other issues before delving into the thorny topic of security. It's very interesting to observe what the two countries are proposing for higher education. Our vice minister for North America, Sergio Alcocer, was telling me that, with the United States as our neighbor, home to 30 or 40 of the most important universities in the world, it's hard to believe that there are not many Mexican students enrolled in them. At the same time, you might suppose that many young Americans could come to Mexico to go to summer school. We should remember that the U.S.-Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (Comexus) exists, as do the Fulbright-García Robles Grants, mechanisms that link our two countries. But, when and how is that flow of students going to increase? Is a new body going to be created? Another fund?

**AAW:** That's the work we have ahead of us: determining what mechanisms we must create to increase the number of students studying in both countries. Today, there are close to 14 000 Mexicans studying in the United States, but only 4 000 Americans in Mexico.

**LC:** In both cases, the number is very low. . .

**AAW:** In contrast, almost 200 000 Chinese are studying in the United States. So we have to make the leaders on both sides of the border see that this isn't healthy, since we're neighbors. We have to create new channels so our young people can get to know the other country.

**LC:** In an interview published by the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE), which by the way, receives support from the U.S. Embassy, the United States is the country most liked by the general public, surpassing Canada.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Mexico's image in the United States is not necessarily the best, but I suppose that the more exchange of students and experiences we have, the better we know each other, and the more we bet on tourism and connectivity, we'll understand each other better.

**AAW:** With more exchanges, particularly of high school or university students, will come new possibilities of improving

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knowledge of the United States and Mexico. Tourism is very important. More than 20 million Americans visit Mexico every year. In 2012, 14.5 million Mexicans spent part of their vacations in the United States. These kinds of experiences are important for putting an end to the stereotypes that exist on both sides of the border. We're very happy with the survey you mentioned.

**LC:** Mr. Ambassador, today a series of things make it easier for tourists and other travelers to cross the U.S. border, as long as they do it for legitimate purposes. The Global Entry program has been wonderful.

**AAW:** Yes, Global Entry is really wonderful for people who visit the United States regularly.

**LC:** I suppose that at the border there are technological mechanisms to make life simpler for people engaged in trade. For example, at the Nogales border, where a large percentage of perishables enter the United States, it's fundamental that the process be simple. In the twenty-first century, how can we make sure that the border is a mechanism for security and at the same time for cooperation?

**AAW:** We have to create a zone of opportunity, of growth on the border. Today, a million people cross it every day, and US\$1.3 billion changes hands in trade, but we have to work to improve the infrastructure. There are long waits at the border, specifically in Tijuana, Laredo, and Ciudad Juárez. So we must eliminate those lines with more traveler programs like Global Entry or Sentry. Actually, we have to have programs for all goods so customs personnel can approve them before they get to the crossing. We have to have safer transportation to ensure that drugs, money, or weapons can't enter, as well as all the illicit articles that cross the border. We have a bi-national commission to work on these issues and planning commissions at each border point to have a common vision of what's coming 10 years ahead. But, we need to create infrastructure and apportion the budget needed to do it. We're working very seriously on this.

**LC:** I wonder, Ambassador Wayne, how you find enough time to deal with so many agendas and issues. I read a recent report from the Woodrow Wilson Center about the border that said that a balance must be struck on issues like competitiveness, security, sustainability, and quality of life.<sup>6</sup> That is, we have to think about the issues as a whole, and not think of the border as a threat for both countries. Are there possibilities of advancing more? We have the Smart Borders treaty, but, can we build models that generate more mutual trust? I heard, for example, that the opportunity has opened up for

creating a preclearance, that is, that immigration and customs paperwork could be done in Mexican airports, so that flights to the United States would be domestic. Is this the case now?

**AAW:** The possibility exists of exploring pilot projects to see if they can work, and people are open to this on both sides of the border. Right now, conversations are on-going with the Mexican government in which we're examining this kind of activity to make the border flow more easily.

**LC:** Very interesting. On the other hand, regarding the Mérida Initiative, does the paradigm of co-responsibility for dealing with security issues continue to be valid? That is, do the two countries feel comfortable with this principle?

**AAW:** I think so. The idea is that this program should evolve, with the idea of co-responsibility remaining in place. Drug and weapons trafficking and their illicit financing are problems shared by both countries, and neither we nor Mexico can solve them with unilateral action. President Peña Nieto's administration has its security priorities, and at this time we are looking to see how to adjust our programs so they fit with those priorities. For example, on the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, we talked with our Mexican colleagues about a new, successful mechanism in the United States: special courts for treating addictions.

**LC:** I read your article.<sup>7</sup> It's very interesting how a heroin addict's life can be changed.

**AAW:** Yes, it's a method that has been successful. It's not a complete solution, since in this process, there are no pre-established solutions. If there were, we wouldn't have so many problems today. However, we must learn together and share best practices that can be useful for both of us.

**LC:** Many community experiences could be useful, even if they're not big national policies.

**AAW:** Exactly.

**LC:** To conclude, Ambassador Wayne, I'd like to talk about an issue that I think is essential. What can we do about what Presidents Obama and Peña Nieto called global and regional leadership? We met at the G20, at the Americas Summit;

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we have a pile of spaces where we can cooperate, but there's one in particular that is sensitive: Central America. During the meeting of the Central American Integration System (SICA), the United States expressed its interest in economically supporting the Central American Security Strategy (ESCA). Mexico has a lot to do there, and part of the Mérida Initiative is to think that the issue has Mesoamerican scope. What can we do together in Central America?

**AAW:** I think there's a lot we can do together. One example is this program of electricity supply that we were talking about before. We can work with the Development Bank of the Americas, which has a program called Mesoamerica, and I think that, to establish this kind of infrastructure in Central America, Mexico is one of the neighbors that can cooperate in this process, and we can help indirectly, since we have experts who can lend support. Also, the Inter-American Development Bank could participate in financing the various projects identified as important in Central America. We could share experiences, with Mexico communicating its own experiences in the areas of economic development and citizen security. Clearly there are great challenges in our countries and in Central America, but together with Canada, Colombia, and other nations, we can offer valuable help to these governments.

**LC:** A few days ago, I was at a meeting of Central American foreign ministers, and in some countries, the situation is desperate. Criminals are really strangling the governments.

**AAW:** Agreed. We must look at the situation from a broader point of view, think of a regional solution. There's no divide between problems involving the United States and Mexico and those of Central America and Mexico and the U.S. So, we should work together. Also, there are big Central American communities, particularly Salvadorans, in the United States, and we must take advantage of these citizens' experience to help the region.

**LC:** They say the best way to make friends is by working together, doing positive things for the world. Recently, cyber-

security has posed some challenges for us. This was a very important issue at the meeting of Presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping, who, after coming to Mexico, visited California. The United States has felt attacked by the way China has dealt with this issue. Some of the Wikileaks information has caused, let's say, a misunderstanding in the bilateral relationship. On the other hand, there's the challenge posed by Edward Snowden. Given the circumstances, could we conceive of a regional cyber-security protocol, or even respect for privacy?

**AAW:** I agree that, today, fundamental individual rights are in play for the citizens of any country, particularly those that share a history of human rights values, civil rights. I'm a fan of efforts to establish principles of mutual respect among countries. The first step is good practices and then international agreements created to protect those rights, to fight against crimes like those committed against intellectual property (piracy). I agree that we must work on these issues, creating a community of ideas, of consensuses, and —why not?— of agreements in several areas to protect the privacy of all our citizens.

**LC:** Ambassador Wayne, thank you very much for this interview. **MM**

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This interview was done July 3, 2013 and broadcast July 4 on the radio news program *Enfoque* (Focus).

<sup>2</sup> Luis Rubio, *Mexico Matters: Change in Mexico and Its Impact upon the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Mexico Institute-Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013), [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/rubio\\_mexico\\_matters.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/rubio_mexico_matters.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Shannon K. O'Neil, *Two Nations Indivisible: Mexico, the United States, and the Road Ahead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. President Barack Obama's visit to Mexico, May 3, 2013. See the speech at <http://spanish.mexico.usembassy.gov/es/news/discurso-y-publicaciones/otros-oficiales/discurso-del-presidente-barack-obama-en-el-museo-nacional-de-antropologia.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, A. C., “México, las Américas y el mundo 2012-2013. Política exterior: opinión pública y líderes,” <http://dominio1.cide.edu/documents/320058/0d79d0e8-a23d-4e30-87dbfa73ddbe579a>.

<sup>6</sup> Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, “Reporte del estado de la frontera. Un análisis integral de la frontera México-Estados Unidos,” [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/spanish\\_reporte\\_estado\\_frontera.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/spanish_reporte_estado_frontera.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Wayne, “Tribunales para adicciones ofrecen esperanza,” *Reforma*, July 26, 2013, [http://www.monitoreodemedios.com.mx/reforma/160112\\_2.pdf](http://www.monitoreodemedios.com.mx/reforma/160112_2.pdf).