

# SECURING THE PARAMETERS OF NORTH AMERICA: A NAFTA CHALLENGE IN A CONTEXT OF US UNILATERALISM

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Even before the events of September 11, 2001 senior officials of all three NAFTA countries had identified the issue of smart borders connecting America's two largest trading partners, Canada and Mexico, to the US market. In the post 9/11 world, the question arises as to the role of Mexico and Canada in an era of US unilateralism. In essence, trilateralism is what's required to manage the security as well as the economic agenda of the North American community, writes Maria Teresa de Madero, Mexico's ambassador to Canada.

Même avant les événements du 11 septembre 2001, les hauts dirigeants des trois pays de l'ALENA avaient établi l'importance de la question des « frontières intelligentes » reliant les deux principaux partenaires commerciaux des États-Unis, le Canada et le Mexique, au vaste marché américain. Mais voilà que dans le monde de l'après-11 septembre, le rôle du Canada et du Mexique à l'ère de l'unilatéralisme américain soulève des questions inédites. Or, écrit Maria Teresa de Madero, ambassadeur du Mexique au Canada, c'est plutôt de trilatéralisme dont nous avons besoin pour gérer les problèmes de sécurité et le programme économique de la communauté nord-américaine.



**T**here are four ideas that I would like to elaborate on and that could serve as a basis for discussion on the future of North American security. I would like to address them beginning with from four basic but crucial questions that could definitively nurture the exchange of views among the three partners in the North American community.

First, are we in the midst of a systemic change?

Second, what are the roles for Mexico and Canada in an era of United States' unilateralism?

Third, what is the so-called North American security agenda?

And fourth, what is Mexico doing to beef up security trilateralism in the region?

Allow me to elaborate.

Are we witnessing the end of a world order? Sadly enough, circumstances have brought the issue of security to the forefront: 9/11 and its Sequels (with Capital "S"); Iraq; the new type of transatlantic alliances built around Iraq; the evolution of the debate regarding Resolution 1441 within the UN Security Council; the results of the recent meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels; and the agenda of the forthcoming OAS Summit on Hemispheric Security are just some of the tokens shedding light on the fact that the paradigms

defining global security are changing. The problem lies in the issue of whether we are positioned in the middle of a transitional period or, to borrow Professor Robert Gilpin's terms, whether we are in the midst of a "systemic change."

From my personal point of view, it feels as if we are somehow "stuck" between two world orders: first, the Cold War, where the threats and enemies were clearly identified and the logic of the game was well delineated: two superpowers, the US and the former USSR; two contending ideologies: capitalism and socialism; two security schemes built around that logic: NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and containment theories such as the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction, appropriately known as MAD, deployed "logically" by both superpowers. The second one is a new world order that has already emerged if we consider the fall of the Berlin Wall as its birth date, but that within the last fourteen years has gone through several different phases complicating the life of the observer, in the sense that its paradigms or guidelines are still fuzzy.

I remember that in the early nineties there was more or less a general consensus on the idea that the end of the bipolar confrontation was brought about peacefully, without a major war marking the end and the beginning of a period in world history. It was also during those years that almost

everyone welcomed the *renaissance* of the Security Council and thought that the end of the “veto era” within the forum was over. Change has taken place; that’s for certain, but it has not happened as peacefully as originally expected. September 11 and Kosovo for example, demonstrate that today’s potential threats are very much dispersed and can show up in the form of an ethnic-cleansing type of war and/or high-tech transnational terrorism, both of which seem very difficult to approach with traditional military means.

**S**ome of the original premises and forecasts are today being contested, and the guidelines of a new security world order are still difficult to identify. US unilateralism as a byproduct of the hyper-power’s Cold War victory and deployed in different shapes and fashions seems to be one of the constant elements of this new world order. Considering the recent French and Russian behaviour towards the war on Iraq and resolution 1441, can we say, then, that such “unilateralism” is here to stay and will become one of the paradigms governing the new security order? Will the US unilateralism find real checks in the international fora in the near future? Does it make any sense for the NATO state members, for example, to continue pressing for the institution’s reform? Has Iraq killed the Security Council, as some experts have pointed out, or, on the contrary, has it “revived” it?

Assuming that US “unilateralism” is here to stay, what are or should be the roles of Mexico and Canada? Shall we, Mexico, and Canada, follow the US’s unilateralism? Does our NAFTA partnership require us to stick with the US premises? Does this partnership give us more room to negotiate with the hegemonic power? I do not have a thorough and definite answer to these key questions. What I do know is that the current similar stances of Mexico and Canada *vis-à-vis* the war in Iraq have to be taken seriously by both governments to advance in our regional security agenda. It seems pressing to



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take advantage of the increasing political coincidence and complementarity being shared by Mexico and Canada. Why? Because, not only regarding the issue of security in the region but with respect to the North American agenda in general, I have always underscored that the strengthening of the Mexico-Canada relationship is the *sine qua non* condition to make headway in both agendas and in North America’s trilateralism.

Is it feasible to achieve a real North American security trilateralism? What is

the current state of the North American trilateral security agenda? It is widely known that prior to 9/11, security was an absent issue in the trilateral agenda and discussions. Even regarding the issue of “border security” in the case of Canada, some experts have pointed out that the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel did not exist, and if it existed, it was in a virtual fashion. September 11 brought in the debate on how to go about turning North America into a more secure region. So the debate began on the well or poorly labeled “North American Security Perimeter”

when the US ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, introduced it in June 2001 almost three months before the 9/11 attacks took place. When Cellucci first raised the issue of the “perimeter,” his declarations might have never taken into account Al-Qa’ida, for example. They were geared towards the idea of accelerating the region’s integration through policy-convergence in the realms of energy, immigration, the environment and law enforcement. While the Canadian press was boosting the debate introduced by Ambassador Cellucci, the Canadian government was rejecting the term “perimeter,” but not the general concept of strengthening North America’s security. However, 9/11 made the debate shift to include other sort of proposals.

**I**t could be argued that the post 9/11 leading response has been headed by the US, basically in a unilateral fashion. This natural US attitude was more obvious in the aftermath of the attacks. Though it is still difficult to define what the term “homeland security” means or should mean for the three North American partners, it is clear that the US authorities began to realize, for one reason or another, that Mexico and Canada were part of “their homeland,” and thus, both countries needed to be somehow included in the security discussions. And it was precisely right after this realization that bilateral agreements such as the Smart Borders Declarations and Plans of Actions were achieved bilaterally with Canada and Mexico. But it is important to highlight that at the end of the day, the initiative to negotiate and adopt the agreement came firstly and mostly from the Canadian government. Though it seems fair to say that while US unilateral policies have dominated the agenda, it is clear that bilateralism has also played a key role.

But it is precisely this type of bilateralism that has been, in a way, obstructing the strengthening of a genuine trilateral approach. It is true that for some issues bilateralism seem to work more efficiently than trilateralism. But in the case of the North American post 9/11 security

agenda, I am a firm believer that trilateralism, compared to bilateralism, could render more benefits to the region’s integration process. Why? Because the attacks confirmed the need for the North American partners to work more closely together in order to approach in a co-ordinated fashion new common threats such as transnational terrorism. It is still a mystery to me why the Smart Borders agreements were negotiated and signed bilaterally. It becomes more of a puzzle when we realize that besides the difference in the number of action-items included, 30 in the case of the Canada-US agreement and 22 in the case of the Mexico-US accord, both documents are almost indetical. The similarities in both accords are vast, but just to mention the most important ones:

- both documents list security strengthening, border modernization and the improvement of the flow of people and merchandise, as their three core issues;
- both include policies concerning the preferential treatment of frequent travelers; the revision and co-ordination for granting visas; exchange of information; merchandise pre-clearance and the use of state-of-the-art equipment to facilitate the work performed by border authorities.

**W**hat is Mexico doing to beef up North American security trilateralism? First of all, Mexico has coherently favoured trilateral approaches to North American security, even before September 11. With the intention of fostering a trilateral vision, during his first days as president of Mexico, Vicente Fox — together with his former national security adviser — put forth the idea of establishing a comprehensive security policy comprising all of the territory included in NAFTA. Since the early days of the debate, Mexico showed a keen interest to develop, in a joint effort with Canada and the US, the “NAFTA Security Area” that would guarantee the protection of all North American borders. For Mexico, the development of this concept was and still is perceived as one of

the components of the comprehensive regional integration scheme called NAFTA-Plus that the Fox Administration has actively promoted. In other words, the trilateralization of security relations in North America is seen by Mexico as a logical and natural post-NAFTA step.

**T**hree final observations. Which ever new North American initiative is presented, it will necessarily have to consider the two main premises of the Smart Borders accords: expedient free trade and increased security. Any policy that leads to slower and difficult transit of goods along our borders has a direct impact on the economic development not only of the weaker partners but of the three of us. Closing borders is no longer an option.

Any approach to strengthen security among NAFTA countries should distinguish very clearly those phenomena that pose real threats to security from those that are part of the daily life of an increasingly integrated region. External security threats should be clearly differentiated from situations that require much better management and administration, such as transit of individuals and goods, regularization of movements of labour force and improved facilities and procedures for the daily legal movement across our borders.

Along the same line of thought, special attention should be granted to potential threats coming from outside the region and to joint efforts in this direction. This will be possible only if a genuine trilateral debate takes place and takes into account the current asymmetries and the priorities and concerns of the three partners. The necessary political will to make headway in that direction is a must.

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