

Mexico's Strategy Toward the United States

La estrategia de México hacia Estados Unidos

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Abstract:

In the relationship between Mexico and the United States, there are numerous factors of a diverse nature whose management requires multiple spaces for cooperation for the benefit of both societies, giving rise to greater bilateral understanding and trust. This article lists the economic, commercial, border, security and migration aspects that stand out today in the dynamic and complex Mexico towards the United States.



Resumen:

En la relación de México con Estados Unidos se presentan numerosos factores de naturaleza diversa cuya gestión requiere múltiples espacios de cooperación en beneficio de ambas sociedades, dando pie a un mayor entendimiento y confianza bilaterales. En este artículo, se enumeran los aspectos económicos, comerciales, fronterizos, de seguridad y migración que hoy sobresalen en la dinámica y compleja México hacia Estados Unidos.



Key Words:

Mexico, United States, migration, security, border, trade, Mexican consular network, protection of Mexicans.



Palabras clave:

México, Estados Unidos, migración, seguridad, frontera, comercio, red consular mexicana, protección de mexicanos.

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Introduction

This year we commemorate 200 years of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States. Although it is a complex relationship that has had its share of convergence and divergences, not only due to the fact of being neighbors, but also to a large number of political, economic, social, cultural, and even demographic factors, we have been able to find multiple spaces for cooperation for the benefit of both societies, giving rise to greater bilateral understanding and trust.

The economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption of global value chains, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its consequences such as rising prices in the energy and food sectors, among others, have led us to a new stage in the international context. The geopolitical reconfiguration that the world is currently experiencing requires us to strengthen the ties between Mexico and the United States, and prepare a shared regional vision to take advantage of the opportunities that arise.

Based on the above, Mexico has outlined a comprehensive and long-term strategy towards the United States, with very clear objectives. First, consular protection for Mexicans in the United States. Second, promote greater regional integration that allows us to make progress on various issues on the bilateral agenda, including migration, economy, security and the border, and combatting climate change for the benefit of our peoples. In addition, promote the institutionalization of the relationship through

bilateral mechanisms that offer effective channels to discuss and reach agreements on the most important issues on the bilateral agenda, including not only at the federal level but, through our consular network, at the state and municipal levels. All this, of course, based on full respect for the sovereignty of the two nations.

For Mexico and the United States, attention to migratory flows is a priority issue. Through the signing of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, the two countries engage in efforts to ensure that migration takes place in an orderly, safe, and regular manner, as well as to address the fundamental causes of migration.

With regard to border issues, our objective is to streamline the ports of entry, so that the capacity of the border for the transit of goods and people is expanded, benefiting the binational communities along our border, turning it into a more efficient space for commercial transit, with more jobs, and considerably safer.

Regarding economic issues, the two nations seek to strengthen cooperation mechanisms to underpin their trading relationship by promoting the creation of more and better jobs, encouraging investment in both countries, and creating a more qualified and competitive labor force. In addition, we are focused on ensuring that the post-pandemic economic recovery is sustainable and equitable.

Security is another of the sensitive and critical issues in our relationship, where we have managed to achieve a vision of shared security and binational collaboration to protect our societies, with a focus on public health and harm reduction, the prevention of cross-border crime, and the dismantling of organized crime networks.

Migration

The region is currently facing a migration crisis driven by multiple changes in circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic slowdown. Since the outset of the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Government of Mexico has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the root causes of migration. In addition, Mexico has reiterated in various international forums and at

the bilateral level the need to expand labor mobility channels in order to reduce incentives for irregular migration, and increase the region's productivity by relocating labor to where it is needed most.

Together with the Government of President Joseph Biden, we have worked to enhance economic growth in those communities with the highest emigration rates through greater coordination and collaboration between our international development cooperation programs.

In addition, the Government of Mexico implemented initiatives such as *Sembrando Vida* and *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* in Central American countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. *Sembrando Vida* offers small farmers the opportunity to enhance their own prosperity with agricultural inputs, a stipend, and technical assistance, while *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* provides young people with opportunities for job training, financial compensation, and apprenticeships.

Through a new collaboration program, *Sembrando Oportunidades*, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been able to reach a greater number of people, since the beneficiaries of Mexican programs subsequently access U.S. programs, boosting their access to job opportunities and economic growth.

Likewise, in the framework of the Ninth Summit of the Americas, held in Los Angeles in June, Mexico and the United States signed, together with nineteen other countries from the American region, the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection, with a view to promoting policies that reduce irregular flows of migrants and open up more regular mobility routes, while focusing on the protection and security of migrants and refugees.

On September 26, 21 special coordinators met at the White House to follow up on these commitments and define the implementation framework of the declaration. During the meeting we discussed how to achieve more orderly, safe, regular, and humane migratory flows through hemispheric cooperation, a vision that our neighbor to the north also shares. In addition, we emphasized ordering migration through labor mobility, which is becoming more important as a tool to combat high inflation rates and accelerate post-pandemic recovery.

Mexico and the United States agreed to create a working group on labor mobility, which has already seen significant results: in October the United

States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced 65 000 additional H2-B visas for temporary non-agricultural workers, of which 20 000 will go to people from Central America and Haiti. This is in addition to the 66 000 H2-B visas already previously authorized and will allow more migrant workers to meet the high demand for work in various sectors.

In addition to bilateral and regional cooperation, both nations have proposed to work hand in hand with international organizations such as the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to strengthen the humanitarian response and ensure the human rights of migrants. The protection of migrants and respect for their human rights in the countries of origin, transit, and destination continue to be a priority for the government of President López Obrador.

Committed to finding new ways to address migration, the two North American countries have implemented an innovative immigration scheme for people from Venezuela. Based on the successful Uniting for Ukraine program, which the United States developed with the cooperation of Mexico after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this scheme seeks to grant humanitarian permits to citizens of Venezuela that allow them to enter the United States in a more orderly, safe, regular, and humane manner.

In the case of Uniting for Ukraine, more than 100 000 Ukrainians entered the United States directly without going to ports of entry to claim asylum. The recent program for Venezuelans has also been successful after it was announced on October 12: as of November 8, more than 11 815 Venezuelans had received authorization to travel to the United States. In this way, the governments of Mexico and the United States continue to work together to promote greater regular mobility and with full respect for migrants' human rights.

Migration is and will continue to be a critical issue for the bilateral relationship. Although it is essential that the United States consider a comprehensive rethinking of its migration policy in order to adapt it to the challenges of our times, Mexico will continue to promote bilateral cooperation in the matter from an innovative and humane perspective, which on the one hand takes into account push factors by promoting greater economic growth in the communities of origin, and also incorporates pull factors by increasing the paths of labor mobility.

Border

The border between Mexico and the United States has been characterized as a dynamic and resilient region, adapting to political, economic, social and even health changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These adaptation processes have not been immediate, but are mainly due to the constant work of all the people, companies, and governments that form part of this binational community.

Given the changes we have experienced and those to come, it is necessary to implement new cutting-edge tools and strategies along the 3175 kilometers of shared border to increase quality of life, competitiveness, and security in both countries.

To give us an idea of the annual dynamics, in 2021, around 13.9 million cargo trucks, 27 000 trains; 155.1 million light vehicles and 27.9 million pedestrians crossed the United States-Mexico border, even with the sanitary restrictions in place due to the pandemic. It is only to be expected that these flows will increase, so we must be prepared.

For this reason, the governments of Mexico and the United States are working to keep current institutional mechanisms active and develop new infrastructure projects, with the intention of reducing waiting times at ports of entry to boost trade, resilience, and job creation.

For example, since 2010 the Bilateral Executive Steering Committee on 21st Century Border Management has promoted a modern, secure, and efficient border. Likewise, the Binational Bridges and Border Crossings Group, an interagency organization of the United States and Mexico, meets three times a year to promote joint initiatives that improve efficiency and coordinate the planning of new crossings.

In this sense, and drawing on this joint work, on October 24, 2022, the agreement for the collection and distribution of income from the new Mesa de Otay II-Otay Mesa East port of entry was signed, following up on the agreements of the memorandum of understanding signed in June 2021 for the construction of this new crossing.

With the construction of the new border crossing between Tijuana and San Diego projected for the end of 2024, traffic congestion will be reduced, therefore also reducing emissions. We will boost economic growth and binational trade by securing shorter waiting times for goods and people.

Likewise, this port of entry will have ten lanes for tourist crossing and ten more for cargo crossing, which are reversible when the volume of traffic so requires, in order to guarantee a maximum crossing time of 20 minutes: a watershed for the development of future projects.

We estimate that a ten-minute reduction in wait times at ports of entry represents USD 26 million in additional cargo entering the United States each month via commercial vehicles, equivalent to over USD 312 million in additional trade per year, and the creation of almost 18 000 direct and indirect jobs in Mexico.¹

Currently, we are also working on the Laredo IV and V projects, improving the infrastructure at the San Luis Río Colorado border port, as well as a new crossing in Mexicali and Agua Prieta to help reduce entry times.

Allowing wait times at the border to continue to increase could result in loss of jobs and income on both sides of the border, slowing down our supply chains and reducing competitiveness in the global marketplace, an issue that is particularly relevant today with the relocation of these processes. That is why the governments of both countries, in coordination with the private sector, academia and civil society, must continue working to continuously develop new strategic infrastructure that facilitates bilateral trade and the crossing of people.

Economic growth, trade and investment

The commercial relationship between Mexico and the United States is one of the most consolidated in the world, greatly benefited by our proximity and geopolitical situation, and by our cultural and social ties, making our countries strategic partners.

¹ Alejandro Brugués Rodríguez, *et al.*, *The Economic Impact of a More Efficient US-Mexico Border: How Reducing Wait Times at Land Ports of Entry Would Promote Commerce, Resilience, and Job Creation*, Washington, D.C., Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center-Atlantic Council, September 2022, p. 6.

Even despite the restrictions on international crossings due to the pandemic, in 2021 Mexico was the second-largest trading partner of the United States. In that year, 14.4% of its total trade was with Mexico, worth USD 661.16 billion. For its part, trade with Canada was 14.5% of the total while China was in third place with 14.3%.²

The figures for trade this year have changed, with Mexico retaking first place and reaching a historic figure of around USD 800 billion. Similarly, the United States remained Mexico's top trading partner. This commercial dynamic has been constructed thanks to the hard work of all sectors involved, both public and private.

An extremely important resource is the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), since it lays the foundations for fairer trade and robust economic growth in the region, fostering greater understanding in production chains not only with the United States, but also with Canada.

The closure of the northern border of Mexico as a result of the pandemic affected both bilateral and global supply chains. In this sense, we must seek solutions and create future scenarios to prevent them from being affected by any regional and global eventuality in the future. Another important tool is the High Level Economic Dialogue (HLED), which is a space for dialogue to strengthen economic cooperation, not only between Mexico and the United States, but also including Central American countries through the Sembrando Oportunidades program.

On the other hand, replicating good international practices that have catalyzed the economies of many other countries, it is important to promote projects to develop new supply chains, with greater added value and that currently do not exist or only outside of our region; this can only be achieved with collaboration between governments, academia, and industry. The information and communication technology, medical equipment and electromobility sectors offer opportunities in the near future that we should not miss and that have enormous potential to strengthen the economy and national security of both countries.

² "Top Trading Partners-December 2021", in U.S. Census Bureau, at <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top2112yr.html> (date consulted: October 28, 2022).

Security

Security cooperation is one of the priority issues on the bilateral agenda between the governments of Mexico and the United States. For this reason, on October 8, 2021 we held the first meeting of the High Level Security Dialogue (HLSD). On the Mexican side, the security cabinet participated together with the Attorney General; the United States was represented by its Attorney General and the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security. As a result of the meeting, the Mexico-United States Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health and Safe Communities was announced.

The Bicentennial Framework is a comprehensive vision that takes a holistic approach to the security phenomenon that includes actions to combat both organized crime and the ravages of uninformed drug use on the general population. The public health approach puts forward a preventive vision to achieve the progressive reduction of harm related to consumption.

To that end, a binational panel of public health experts was established to exchange experiences, medical information, and observations on problematic drug use trends and outcomes in states where recreational marijuana use has been legalized. In this way, we strengthen the capacities of the Mexican and U.S. governments to meet the growing demand for narcotics.

In particular, the problem of synthetic drugs will be analyzed through the development of prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and harm reduction strategies. The use of drugs such as naloxone is also contemplated, as a fundamental tool to save the lives of people who suffer a fentanyl overdose.

Building trust must go both ways. There are structural challenges that are part of the dynamics of both countries, but there is a common will to continue moving forward together. In this sense, it is worth noting that during the second HLSD meeting in October of this year, the advances that both countries have made in the fight against transnational criminal organizations thanks to bilateral cooperation were presented. However, emphasis was placed on the need to expand efforts to contain the trafficking of arms, synthetic drugs, and people.

Mexico has also put arms trafficking on the table. Although it is acknowledged that President Biden and the United States Congress took a step forward on this issue with the legislative reform so that arms trafficking

is prosecuted at the federal level, much remains to be done in order to address this problem.

In summary, both the High Level Dialogue on Security and the Bicentennial Framework are signs of the change in the strategic vision of security cooperation between the two countries, with coordinated actions on both sides of the border and with a common vision that has translated into concrete actions and a mutually beneficial action plan based on trust and full respect for sovereignty.

Our strategic approach in the Bicentennial Framework is simple, but profound for our country: leaving north-south assistance behind and, instead, including two public policy priorities for Mexico. In the first place, including arms trafficking as part of the supply chain of organized crime that makes it possible to move drugs to the north and that plagues Mexican society with high levels of violence.

Second, inserting a public health perspective in both countries, considering, for example, that the enormous problem of addiction to fentanyl that blights the United States originated in the massive use of legal opioids, and that by increasing the availability of this substance in the region due to its great demand among American society, its consumption will also become a health challenge for our own country.

The consular network of Mexico in the United States

It is a source of pride to be able to say that Mexico has the largest consular network of one country in any other, since this is synonymous with the commitment we have with our community residing abroad in the demographic, economic, cultural, political, and social aspects. In the United States alone, our country operates fifty consulates in twenty-five states of this country that is a neighbor, partner and ally.

As part of this commitment to our compatriots, starting early next year we will have two further consulates in the United States, in Oklahoma and New Jersey. This will make it possible to serve and reach more Mexican men and women, offering support in terms of documentation (notarization, civil registration, visas, passports, registrations, and legalizations),

protection (immigration information and legal guidance), and community programs such as health information points and the innovative comprehensive care information points for women.

One of the main advances made by this administration in consular matters has been birth registration by recognition of gender identity. Gender identity is a constitutive element of people's identity, meaning its recognition by the State is of vital importance to ensure the full enjoyment of people's human rights, including protection against discrimination. This year, 73 038 civil registration procedures have been carried out in the Mexican consular network in the United States; this includes 504 gender recognition certificates.

The first responsibility of any consulate is to provide services, assistance, and protection to nationals living abroad. This is a priority for the Government of Mexico. Mexican consulates issue secure and reliable documents of great value to citizens living abroad, including identity documents such as passports, consular registration and voter identification cards, as well as birth certificates. It should be noted that, as of July, the Consular Identification Card has improved technology and additional security measures that facilitate its acceptance as an official document in the United States and Mexico. In addition, the Consular Identification Card issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is now the first official Mexican identification that allows you to choose a non-binary gender option, in line with our efforts to recognize the identities of all people.

Likewise, to bring consular services closer to all Mexicans, mobile consulates travel to different cities, offering flexible hours, including weekends. In this way, attention is provided to a greater number of people who request consular services and who otherwise would not be able to access them due to the distance.

It is also important to emphasize that the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) addresses the initiatives and community needs of Mexicans who live and work outside our country, by promoting strategies, integrating programs, collecting proposals and recommendations from the communities, its members, its organizations, and advisory bodies. The IME seeks to strengthen the ties of Mexicans with their country of origin, and also promote their cross-cultural integration with the societies of the countries in which they reside.

Meanwhile, Mexican consulates in the United States also work closely with state and local authorities. We review cases for protection of the rights of compatriots, regardless of their immigration status. In turn, close cooperative relationships are maintained with community organizations, business leaders, and other associations at the local level, including cultural and academic institutions. In this way, through constant dialogue and daily work, we promote the civic and cultural participation of Mexicans, trade and investment, innovation, and joint projects. Dual nationality is also accepted as a positive process, resulting in a better understanding between neighboring countries with a high degree of social integration and a positive projection abroad.

The bicentennial and future of the bilateral relationship

200 years after we first established diplomatic relations, it is clear that our relationship must continue to deepen and become more dynamic due to a series of structural factors, shared challenges and, above all, opportunities for mutual benefit. The complexity of the bilateral relationship means there will always be contentious issues that will have to be resolved; however, the coordinated work and encouraging results on a wide range of priority issues far outweigh the frictions.

Our strategy toward the United States will continue to promote bilateral understanding, including at the subnational level, the defense of our compatriots in the United States, the growth of trade and investment, the institutionalization of the bilateral relationship, and a greater balance in the interests of both countries. Mexico must continually review its objectives and adapt them to the circumstantial changes that arise in order to ensure that North America continues to be the most dynamic and competitive region in the world, and in this way enhance opportunities for our respective societies.