

Put Mexico at the top of Canada's aid list

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Lurid headlines about mass graves and headless corpses – the premise for Carlos Fuentes's most recent novel *Destiny and Desire* – are a daily reminder of Mexico's existential war with the cartels that smuggle people and drugs into the United States. Mexico has other problems, including basic governmental institutions like policing and justice, that would benefit from Canadian advice and assistance.

Since NAFTA, Mexico has suffered from a lack of strategic consideration by Canada. Our policy initiatives often lack follow-through, especially in maintaining regular contact at the ministerial level, or reflect the kind of heavy-handedness for which we criticize the United States. The imposition of a visa on Mexican visitors in 2009 was badly handled. Still in place, it is a reminder of our ineffectual refugee determination system and its reform should be a priority for the re-elected Harper government.

Mexico is Canada's third-largest trading partner and our fourth-largest export market, and its economic prospects are positive. The World Bank's 2010 annual report, *Doing Business*, declared Mexico the easiest place in Latin America to run a company. Goldman Sachs predicts that in 40 years, Mexico will be the world's fifth-largest economy, bigger than Russia, Japan or Germany. More than 2,500 Canadian firms are active. Walk down any of Mexico City's main streets and you will spot a Bank of Nova Scotia, now the sixth-largest bank in Mexico. Shop in the supermarket and you are likely to find Canadian products.

The supply-chain dynamics that underpin the Canada-U.S. relationship now embrace Mexico. Magna has over 30 auto-parts plants while RIM produces BlackBerrys for the global marketplace. Aerospace facilities in Queretaro also build components for Bombardier aircraft, including those shipped north to Montreal for final assembly. Canadian mining firms are major players and bolster our place as Mexico's fourth-largest foreign investor.

Our provinces, especially the premiers, have put effort into the relationship but we must do more. "We need," argues Bob Pastor in his new book, *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*, "to start over with a big North American idea, one based on the simple premise that all three countries benefit when one succeeds, and we are all hurt when one fails."

Parallel with the new Canada-U.S. border and regulatory initiative, we need to develop a coherent strategy towards Mexico that looks at our integrated trade and investment. Identify opportunities for common cause, as we demonstrated in pandemic planning over H1N1. We both have shared interests in curtailing U.S. gun imports, in securing better access for our trucking, in joint action against U.S. agricultural subsidies.

Most of all, Mexico needs help with institution-building in areas like training an independent judiciary, reliable policing and managing pluralism. If we can provide 1,000 trainers in Afghanistan, then surely we can do more for Mexico, where our interests are vastly more important.

Self-interest alone should motivate us. If things go badly for Mexico in its war with the cartels and the situation worsens on the U.S.-Mexico border, it will be very difficult for any U.S. administration to differentiate and grant special dispensation on the northern border. Immigration is changing the political demography of the U.S., with nearly 50 million Americans claiming Latino roots.

Mexico should be our main target for aid and development. With almost half of its 110 million citizens under 30, Mexico needs jobs and opportunities, schools and hospitals, roads and infrastructure to build a new social contract. Putting Mexico at the top of our development agenda would also signal that we are serious about the Americas. We will reap geopolitical rewards in our relationship with the United States. It will also fuel the trade and commerce that guarantees our own prosperity. If ever there was a country where our economic interests and commitment to democratic development coalesce, it is Mexico.

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