

# North America's Security Perimeter

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## Introduction

The profound economic and political changes Mexico underwent during the 1980s and 1990s did not appear to have a significant effect on its foreign policy as it continued to maintain, right until the end of the last administration of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a relatively isolationist position in international affairs more interested in domestic security with a focus on organized crime.<sup>2</sup> This changed, however, with the arrival of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) to the presidency in 2000 as he sought to take Mexico into a more activist international role through a foreign policy hinged on two main tracks: a closer political relation with its northern neighbours and active internationalism through a more prominent role within multilateral institutions, especially the United Nations. In regard to the former, Fox articulated his vision of a new North America early in his administration. At the Quebec City Summit of the Americas of April 2001, he declared his desire to establish a "North American Union," an arrangement similar to the European Union that would involve a common currency, a customs union, new political institutions, the harmonization of a wide range of policies, and the establishment of a North American Regional Development Bank. Fox's proposals were received rather coolly by his northern counterparts at the time. Then Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien (1993-2003) rejected Fox's entreaty stating that Canada's interests in North America were primarily economic, while President George W. Bush declared that closer cooperation could only take place on issues related to immigration.

The attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001 (9/11) changed dramatically the dynamic and nature of North American relations, however, igniting interest in closer cooperation among the three countries, especially on issues relating to security, border patrol and immigration. Soon after the attacks, Fox declared: "... [w]e consider that the struggle against terrorism forms part of a commitment of Mexico to Canada and the United States, as a result of the need to construct the framework of the

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<sup>2</sup> Mexico's foreign policy during PRI rule was firmly grounded on the principle of non-intervention and characterized by an inward-looking position on security matters. For an overview of Mexico's traditional foreign policy during PRI rule see Ojeda 1981, and for an overview of Mexico's security approach to its foreign policy see Benítez Manaut 1996. Mexico's foreign policy underwent some modifications during the 1990s, but these changes were limited to economic matters as President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1992) sought increased economic integration with the U.S. (Heredia 1997).

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North American Free Trade Agreement within which we build a shared space for development, well-being and integral security.”<sup>3</sup> The U.S. also expressed interest in further integration. Paul Celluci, then-Ambassador of the U.S. to Canada, urged, in October of 2001, for the need to update border policies and to harmonize immigration procedures. Canada, under former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, called, in turn, for tougher screening measures at entry points so as to facilitate internal trade flows.<sup>4</sup>

This renewed interest in strengthening collaboration in North America crystallized into the call for the establishment of a “North American Security Perimeter,” an arrangement whereby the three countries would cooperate in a variety of areas creating a common security area within which trade would be protected (Fry 2003: 14-15). The three North American countries have taken several significant steps to strengthen collaboration on security matters. In effect, security cooperation within the continent has never been as strong, and it has in fact been institutionalized between Mexico and the U.S. on some levels. Nonetheless, despite this new level of continental security cooperation, we are still far from the establishment of an international regime that would resemble anything close to a security perimeter.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, what we are witnessing is the emergence of an informal North American security system that has unfolded along the two traditional axes that have historically characterized North American relations: the U.S.-Canada relationship and the U.S.-Mexico relationship. In this article I argue that, while security cooperation in North America has increased within the region, it has primarily unfolded through bilateral agreements and initiatives between the U.S. and both of its neighbours. We are therefore far from the construction of a formal trilateral ‘security perimeter.’

The article is divided into two main sections. The first section reviews the various steps that have been taken in the area of security cooperation in North America since 2001 by looking closely at the Mexican case. As we shall see, cooperation has taken place mostly through bilateral agreements. In the case of Mexico, some of these agreements have essentially amounted to the institutionalization of security relations with the U.S., a remarkable development indeed given Mexico's historic reluctance to establish formalized links with the U.S. security establishment. The second section looks at the obstacles which are likely to impede the establishment of a continental security perimeter: the divergent priorities of the three countries and changing political realities.

### Security in the Post 9/11 North America

The attacks of 9/11 on New York and Washington brought about a fundamental change in the dynamics of North American relations. Since the coming into effect of the

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<sup>3</sup> Declaration made by President Fox at the “Meeting for the Evaluation of Co-ordinated Action for Border and National Security,” Tijuana, Mexico, October 3, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> “Don't Act Alone, PM tells Bush,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 10, 2002. See also: <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/canada-magazine/issue14/14t3-en.asp>

<sup>5</sup> In here I use the Stephen Krasner's classical definition of what an international regime is: “implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (1983: 142).

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North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 – when the idea of North America as a regional entity crystallized – trilateral relations had primarily focused on closer economic integration. However, with the events of 9/11, security rose to the top of the U.S. national agenda as the defence of the 'homeland' became the most important priority for the administration of George W. Bush under the banner of the 'war on terror.' Within this new context, economic and political relations between the U.S. and its two neighbours became subordinated to the security concerns of the U.S. Security collaboration among the three countries subsequently increased to levels not seen before as Canada and Mexico have gradually increased their cooperation with the U.S. Nonetheless, increased North American cooperation on security matters has mostly evolved through bilateral agreements and initiatives given the nature of North American relations. Despite the adoption of NAFTA, North American relations have, for the most part, unfolded along its two traditional axes: the U.S.-Canada relation and the U.S.-Mexico relation. As a result, the U.S. has signed several bilateral agreements with both of its neighbours.

### *Canada and the U.S.*

In the case of Canada and the U.S., cooperation in areas of security and defence has existed since the establishment of the U.S.-Canada Military Cooperation Committee in 1946 and the creation of the North American Space Command (NORAD) in 1957. But it increased and strengthened on a variety of other areas after 9/11.<sup>6</sup> Within weeks of the attacks, Canada established a Borders Taskforce with the intention of developing a new strategy to manage the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel within the new security reality. This taskforce eventually led to the signing, on December 12, 2001, of the Smart Borders Agreement (SBA) between the two countries.<sup>7</sup> The SBA, which institutes measures to facilitate the flow of goods between the two countries, set the stage for increased bilateral cooperation. Within the SBA, both countries created the Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBETs).<sup>8</sup> The IBET's are multi-agency groups of several law enforcement officials from both countries and different levels of government that share information and intelligence, sometimes daily, on matters related to national security and organized crime.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, on December 3, 2002, both countries signed the Joint Statement of Cooperation on Border Security and Regional Migration Issues. Through this statement, both countries agreed to include Canadian personnel in the U.S. Anti-Terrorist

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<sup>6</sup> Cooperation between the two countries began almost immediately as Canada allowed the diversion of more than 220 commercial jetliners to its airports and placed its entry points in a state of emergency. Canada-US cooperation on border management predates the 9/11 attacks, however. In 1995 they signed the *Accord on our Shared Borders* agreement and in 1997 both countries' immigration departments (Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the US Immigration and Naturalization Services) began developing a regional approach to migration issues through the *Border Vision*, which eventually resulted in the launch of the Canada-U.S. Partnership Forum (Benítez and Rodríguez 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The Agreement involves 22 specific points on which both countries decided to collaborate. For further details, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/usmxborder/22points.html>.

<sup>8</sup> The IBETs have increasingly been used along the US and Canadian border. They proved vital in the arrests of the 17 alleged terrorists in the Greater Toronto Area in June 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Further information can be found at [http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/security/ibets\\_e.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/security/ibets_e.htm).

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Elite Group. It also allows members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) access to U.S. intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, on December 4, 2003, both countries signed the Free Trade Secure Trade Programme (FAST). The FAST consists of the registration of businesspeople, who belong to the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT), allowing them faster border crossing through special lanes.<sup>11</sup> In regard to defence, cooperation has intensified across several areas and both countries have in fact been negotiating a new agreement that would see the expansion of NORAD to include maritime surveillance.<sup>12</sup>

### *Mexico and the U.S.*

Security cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico has also increased since 9/11. Soon after the attacks, Mexico ordered measures to protect oil fields and platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and a security belt was established around the whole country. The Mexican armed forces also immediately implemented Operation Sentinel (*Operación Centinela*), with 18,000 personnel from the armed forces committed (Benítez and Rodríguez 2006: 26). Moreover, the Mexican government stepped up security efforts and assigned increased security and surveillance responsibilities to various ministries: The Ministry of Defence was tasked with airport security and special surveillance across the border; the Ministry of the Navy and the Attorney General's Office (PGR) was directed to facilitate collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA); the Ministry of Public Security (SSP) and National Institute for Migration (INM) were asked to redouble efforts of surveillance on borders and bus stations; and the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR) created the National Security Commission to guarantee the security of national and foreign tourists.

Mexico went beyond the immediate steps it took right after 9/11 and has reached several agreements with the U.S. to coordinate efforts on several fronts. A version of the SBA agreed upon by the U.S. and Canada was adopted and signed by the US and Mexico on March 22, 2004.<sup>13</sup> The Mexican-U.S. SBA is more limited in scope to its northern counterpart, but it does replicate some measures, such as the sharing of information on individuals who 'pose a threat' and the establishment of an 'Advance Passenger Information' exchange system.

Both countries have also agreed to exchange more fluidly intelligence and security information and have advanced toward greater coordination on migration matters. Moreover, during the visit of then-Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, to Mexico in February 2004, the two countries signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" in which the U.S. guaranteed that the repatriation of Mexican nationals would be done in a humane and secure manner. A joint communiqué was also issued at the time which established the Plan for Border Security. The plan ratified and expanded a plan

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<sup>10</sup> For details of the agreement, please see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/press/01/0126-pre.html#statement>.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/newsroom/factsheets/2005/0125fast-e.html>.

<sup>12</sup> "NORAD to Include Maritime Surveillance," *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/usmxborder/01.html>

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previously signed in 2001 and it agrees on measures to facilitate the exchange of information to fight the organized trafficking of people as well as the establishment of exchange programmes for the training of personnel in charge of carrying out the plan. Further, in late 2003 the Fox administration authorized the deployment of agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to operate in Mexico City's international airport.<sup>14</sup> Finally, 237 Mexican military personnel have participated since 2003 in the newly established Counter-Terrorism Fellowship Programme (CTFP) in the U.S.<sup>15</sup>

This level of cooperation between the two countries is certainly unprecedented given the historic reticence of the Mexican political elite to cooperate with the US security establishment, a reticence that has been fuelled by the perception of nationalist public opinion that no formal engagements should be undertaken with the U.S. as they might pose a threat to the country's sovereignty. It is worth noting that a majority of Mexicans generally approve of increased security cooperation with the U.S. For example, while the Mexican media decried Fox's decision to allow FBI agents to operate in Mexico City's airport citing a violation of the country's sovereignty, 63% of Mexicans supported the initiative.<sup>16</sup> What appears to be of special relevance is the fact that security relations between the two countries have gone beyond mere cooperation on these issues and have assumed a certain level of institutionalization. Mexico's intelligence institution, the Centre for Research on National Security (CISEN) and the U.S. Information Analysis and Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate (IAIP), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), have established six inter-ministerial working groups devoted to the protection of critical infrastructure along the US-Mexico border. These groups are presided by a 'bilateral steering committee' and are organized by sector: energy, health, agriculture, water, telecommunications and transportation. Local agencies in Mexico have also increased cooperation with U.S. federal agencies, such as the FBI, and the DHS is currently elaborating the Operation Ice Storm. This operation consists of a plan of action to implement immigration and customs regulations in collaboration with Mexican authorities (Benítez and Rodríguez 2006).

### *Trilateral Cooperation*

The North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), launched by the leaders of the three countries at their high-level meeting of Waco, Texas, in March 2005, seemed to point to the progression toward the construction of a trilateral arrangement and quite possibly the institutionalization of a North American security perimeter. However, upon the release of the SPP's goals June 2005, it became clear that the agreement called for further cooperation on border controls, transportation and emergency planning procedures, and that it deals mostly with regulatory issues on migration and automobile integration. Although defence and security cooperation figure in

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<sup>14</sup> "Agentes al servicio de EU vigilan el aeropuerto del DF, Admite la PFP" *La Jornada*, 1 de enero, 2004 (<http://www.jornada.unam.mx>).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/fmtrmx.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> See Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales, and Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas "Global Views 2004: Comparing American and Mexican Opinion and Foreign Policy" <http://www.cfr.org/globalviews2004>.

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this new partnership, it is limited to maritime and port surveillance, and, on the defence file, it is mostly a U.S.-Canada affair.<sup>17</sup> At the meeting held on March 31, 2006, in Cancún, the three North American leaders declared their intention to 'advance the agenda' of the SPP. However, the next phase of the SPP deals mostly with issues of business competitiveness, Avian Influenza preparedness, energy, and border management. On the security front, steps are taken to coordinate efforts on disaster management, both natural or man made. However, there is nothing in the document that would point to the building of a security perimeter.

What we have witnessed, then, is a strengthening of cooperation among the three countries, which on certain areas has become institutionalized, rather than the emergence of an international security regime that involves the three North American countries. Despite calls for the establishment of a security perimeter, the three countries appear to continue to operate along the two traditional axes, and there has been stronger cooperation between Canada and the U.S. on the defence and security fronts. Increased cooperation has primarily taken place through bilateral agreements and initiatives. The U.S. has naturally remained at the centre of security relations in the continent, but it has carried out cooperation bilaterally with its two neighbours.

### *Mexico's Approach to Regional Security*

Several factors appear to explain the fact that Mexico has not sought the same level of cooperation with the U.S. that Canada has, especially on the security file. Among many in Mexico's political elite, the link between security and trade was not rapidly or easily recognized. Despite the fact that over 92% of Mexico's exports go to the U.S., Mexico was not quick to react to the new security reality to ensure that trade continued to flow undisrupted. Mexico did not act quickly to protect its trade with the US after 9/11. In effect, Fox was not among the first heads of state to offer official condolences to the U.S. and to offer assistance. This is in stark contrast with Canada's swift reaction as it proceeded almost immediately in establishing a task force to look into ways in which trade be protected within the post 9/11 reality. In Canada, the economic consequences from a disruption to trade with the U.S. became all too obvious in the hours after 9/11 given how highly integrated the three economies have become.<sup>18</sup> The Smart Border Agreement was in fact a Canadian initiative (Welsh 2004: 58-59).

Part of the reason why Mexico has dragged its feet on the security front is because it has traditionally looked inward on matters of security as well as a different conception of security. Mexico's has traditionally held an inward-oriented view on

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<sup>17</sup> The details of the initiative were released in June 2005 and can be found at <http://www.spp.gov>.

<sup>18</sup> As Stephen Flynn reported, "within 36 hours of after September 11 attack, Daimler-Chrysler announced that it would have to close one of its assembly plants because Canadian supplies were caught in an 18-hour traffic jam at the border. Ford announced that five of its plants would have to lie idle the following week. The cost of this loss in productivity?: each assembly plant produces on average \$1 million worth of cars per hour" (2001: 60). More trade occurs between the US and Canada at the Detroit-Windsor border than occurs between the US and the European Union (Grunwald 2002).

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security, and when it has included an international dimension, it has mostly been on intermestic issues such as drug trafficking and organized crime. The Fox administration attempted to reframe the notion of national security upon coming into office. His National Development Plan of 2001-2006 – the development plan that every Mexican president is constitutionally obliged to formulate for his administration – is rather vague, however, stating that the new government would adapt the country's national security to the “new times and the new phenomenon of vulnerability.” But the new approach to security still focuses on national domestic issues, such as corruption, environmental degradation and organized crime. At the international level, Fox's administration in fact disengaged from security regimes by withdrawing from the Rio Treaty in 2002. Moreover, security issues in Mexico have continued to revolve around human security and it in effect became an area of priority for the Fox administration given its deterioration over the last few years, trumping issues of national security. The new administration of Felipe Calderón, who assumed office on December 1, 2006, appears poised to continue the focus on internal security matters. In effect, a salient element of his administration so far has been the renewed effort in tackling domestic security issues, especially on drug trafficking and organized crime.

Furthermore, political leaders in Mexico, regardless of the party, appear to be constrained in their ability to engage overtly with the U.S. on security and defence issues given the perceived nationalist sentiments harboured by the population. Even though polling consistently shows that a majority of Mexicans support cooperation with the U.S. on security matters,<sup>19</sup> there is a generalized perception that Mexican public opinion is overwhelmingly nationalistic, with some anti-U.S. overtones, something to which the political leadership feels that it must listen. In part, this is due to the role of the media which does tend to be generally nationalistic, perpetuating the perception.

Finally, in regard to defence, there is immense opposition within Mexico's Army to increased collaboration with the U.S. armed forces in any significant way. Although Mexico's Navy appears to be prepared to do so, the top brass of Mexico's Army have continually expressed their lack of interest in expanding defence collaboration with the U.S. They have reiterated that their priorities are domestic, such as natural disaster relief and combating drug trafficking, which have historically been their areas of operation (Díez and Nicholls 2006). The Mexican armed forces have therefore not pushed for further cooperation from within Mexico, something which could apply pressure on the government to increase cooperation with the U.S.

### The Prospects of Trilateral Security Co-operation in North America

As we have seen, security cooperation in North America has primarily unfolded on a bilateral level. A question naturally arises: are there any prospects for the establishment of a trilateral security regime in the continent? It would appear that, at least discursively, the three countries are still interested in building on NAFTA and on furthering North American integration. This much was evident with SPP initiative, when the leaders declared their desire to “... develop new avenues of cooperation that will make our open

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<sup>19</sup> See the results on questions relating to security cooperation in Chicago Council, *ibid*.

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societies safer and more secure, our businesses more competitive, and our economies more resilient." But it is not clear that the desire to further continental integration necessarily equates to a call or a vision to establish a security system.

For instance, Canada has expressed an interest in further integration. In the International Policy Statement revealed by former Prime Minister Paul Martin (2003-2006) in May of 2005, his administration reasserted its commitment to North American and emphasized aspects of cooperation. It also considered Mexico as a strategic partner. But there has not been any initiative to establish a continental security system. As for the current Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, it is still unclear what his position on North American relations is and, should he have a vision for the continent, he has yet to unveil it. His minority government was elected on 'five priorities' that are entirely domestic in nature (tax policy, the introduction of an 'Accountability Act' and a child care allowance, combating street crime and health-care waiting times 'guarantees'). In terms of security, Harper has begun to negotiate a new agreement to expand cooperation with the United States in defence matters through an extension of NORAD, but it does not include Mexico.<sup>20</sup>

### Four Factors Working Against a Formal Security Regime

In the case of Mexico, greater cooperation with the U.S. on security issues was willingly forthcoming from the Fox administration, as we have seen, and Calderón appears to want to continue it, but several factors have complicated any push for further integration. The first one is the Mexican government's inability to reach agreement with the Bush administration on immigration. A central policy objective of the foreign policies of both Fox and Calderon has been the establishment of a temporary workers programme for Mexicans living in the U.S. Reaching a migratory agreement with the U.S. seemed likely at the beginning of Fox's term given that President Bush was receptive to the idea. At their first meeting in Crawford Texas in August of 2001, Bush declared his willingness to work on this file and to push for a workers programme through Congress. Two weeks after the meeting, however, the attacks of 9/11 occurred relegating migration to the bottom of the U.S. national agenda. Attempts to increase integration will be difficult unless a migration agreement is reached as the protection of Mexican workers in the U.S. is cited as the country's number one foreign policy priority by 88 percent of Mexicans.<sup>21</sup> Despite Calderón's declarations that his administration will continue to pursue a migration agreement with the US, its prospects will most certainly depend on the manner in which the issues is resolved within the U.S. Congress rather than any agreement reached between the two countries. As we witnessed in the Spring of 2006, despite the mass mobilizations that took place across the U.S. by illegal workers (mostly from Mexico), the new migratory bill unravelled in the U.S. Senate due to partisan motives.

Second, the enthusiasm with which Mexicans supported NAFTA when it was first adopted has subsided substantially. For example, 70 percent of Mexicans say that NAFTA has had a positive effect on the U.S. economy while only 44 percent think it has

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<sup>20</sup> "Tories Poised to Sign a New Defence Pact with U.S." *The Globe and Mail*, February 20, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> See Chicago Council, "Global Views."

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had a positive effect on the Mexican economy. Moreover, 70 percent of Mexicans believe that the U.S. has benefited the most from NAFTA while only 8 percent believe Mexico has benefited the most.<sup>22</sup> The economic benefits that President Carlos Salinas de Gortari promised with the advent of NAFTA have not materialized. Although Mexican exports to the U.S. and Canada have indeed trebled since its coming into effect, poverty has not been reduced in any significant way and it appears that the wealth has failed to be distributed equitably. Income distribution has widened over the last decade and the country has started to experience a stark regional differentiation where its southern parts have failed to reap the benefits of free trade and have lagged behind. Third, in the same manner in which the U.S. failure to abide by NAFTA rulings on lumber dispute eroded the legitimacy of NAFTA before Canadian public opinion, several disagreements between Mexico and the US on some areas (i.e. the US refusal to allow Mexican transportation trucks to enter US soil) have had a similar effect in Mexico.

Fourth, the U.S. decision to act outside multilateral institutions in the invasion of Iraq has fuelled the distrust and suspicion of U.S. intentions among a great number of Mexicans and augmented anti-American sentiments. This is in part due to the faith Mexico has historically placed on multilateralism and non-intervention. For example, 55 percent of Mexicans believe that the U.S. role in the world is negative, 43 percent express distrust of U.S. foreign policy, 77 percent believe that the U.S. should not become the policeman of the world, and 60 percent believe that strengthening the UN is a very important foreign policy goal, compared with 38 percent of Americans.<sup>23</sup> It appears that any attempt to further integration would first have to address these negative feelings in public opinion at some level.

More fundamentally, however, the main obstacle for further integration beyond areas of trade regulation and border management is the disparate national priorities of the three governments. For the U.S., the 'homeland security' has become the number one priority for the current administration and all other issues have been placed much further down the list. For Canada and Mexico, trade with the U.S. continues to be of utmost importance, but for Mexico issues of economic development, drug trafficking and personal security are atop its citizens' priorities and any attempt at further integration will not get far unless these issues are not formally addressed. And although some within Mexico's administration are said to be trying to resume talks for further integration given the recent improvement of relations between Mexico and the U.S. (Wood 2006), the deterioration of human security in Mexico in 2007 would suggest that the Calderón administration will continue to concentrate in domestic issues.<sup>24</sup>

According to some theories of regime formation, the establishment of formal regimes is to a great extent determined by the convergence of the interests of stakeholders (Keohane 1983; Stein 1983; Axelrod and Keohane 1986). Neo-liberal

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<sup>22</sup> See Chicago Council, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> According to the Mexican daily *El Universal*, by May 15, 2007, 1,000 Mexicans had been killed since the beginning of the year in fights related to the 'war on drugs' between drug cartels and government forces. See: <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/editoriales/37572.html>.

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Institutionalists argue that formal regimes – which are based on collaboration as opposed to cooperation – are unlikely to emerge when stakeholders maintain widely disparate goals as the decisions they make will produce sub-optimal results, given the differential in objectives (Stein 1983). If theories can be used to look into the future of a North America Security Perimeter, it appears that given that the three countries have varied objectives, the likelihood of the emergence of a formal security framework is rather small.

### *The Need for Closer Cooperation*

It can well be argued that the formation of a formal security system is not in the interest of the three countries to continue to pursue. Despite the fact that security does not have the same level of priority for the three countries, steps can be taken to institutionalize security relations in North America and to create a formal security perimeter. Instead debate should not be on whether closer cooperation on security should take place but rather on how. At a very pragmatic level, the economies of Mexico and Canada are extremely dependent on the free and stable flow of goods across borders: 92% of Mexico's exports and 86% of Canada's exports go to the U.S. As a result, any disruption to trade caused by a security threat, whether it be terrorist or otherwise, would have an enormous effect on the economies of the two countries. Should an attack on the U.S. be carried out by an individual or group of people using either Canada or Mexico as an entry point, the consequences would be disastrous. A formal security arrangement would of course not provide any guarantee that this would be prevented. But it would at least share the responsibility more equally and diminish any attempt at closing down the borders.

Mexico lacks the resources necessary to step up security in any significant way and has other priorities. The establishment of a formal security regime would potentially result in the transfer of resources from its northern neighbours which will in turn allow it to strengthen some of its notoriously weak and corrupt security institutions. The wave of violence that took place in some border cities during the summer of 2005, during which several police officers were killed by organized crime and dozens of others jailed for having collaborated with drug traffickers, is but an example of such institutional weakness. The federal government was forced to relieve the municipal police of its security responsibilities and send in the army under the 'Secure Mexico' programme.

### *How far are Canada and Mexico willing to go?*

There exists the view in Canada and Mexico among the political elites, observers, academic circles and significant sectors of society that any pursuit of further security integration would inevitably result in the loss of sovereignty and would represent the imposition of the priorities of the U.S. Peter Andreas captures that feeling exquisitely when he refers to the positions of Canada and Mexico within a post-9/11 world as one of "two scared mice next to a neurotic elephant" (2003:11). He argues that, given the structural imbalance and power asymmetries in North America, Washington "... has significant policy leverage over its immediate neighbours, leaving them with limited space to manoeuvre. Here the United States largely sets the policy agenda and narrows the

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room for autonomous policy choices" (2003:12). US immigration policy is the most dramatic case in point of U.S. unilateralism.

Yet, as Jennifer Welsh shows, the proposal to reach the Smart Border Agreements in the region was a Canadian initiative and a policy triumph for Canada (2004: 58-60). She details how the U.S. had no clear vision of what the post-9/11 borders should look like and Canadian officials elaborated a plan that was eventually adopted by the US. As we have seen, a version of the plan was replicated along the Mexico-U.S. border. This was not an imposition of the U.S. on Canada and attests to the extent to which Canada still enjoyed policymaking autonomy.

But more importantly, the establishment of formal institutions would make it easier to provide greater transparency and accountability in security cooperation. As mentioned before, security cooperation in North America has been strengthened on several areas. But there is some evidence that such cooperation has involved areas that are not known to the public, such as anti-terrorist and military training. In an interview with Loretta Bondi, a high-ranking U.S. official stated that: "we do a lot of that [anti-terrorist training] because Mexicans badly need it. We try to keep it quiet since Mexicans are very sensitive to that" (2004: 86).

The same official stated that his agency has been putting together a 'counter-terrorism training package' which includes basic investigation, interview and interrogation techniques, as well as crisis management and hostage negotiations, evidence gathering and surveillance (Bondi 2004: 86). The same informal arrangements are occurring in other areas, such as defence cooperation. Despite the Mexican army's official position that they do not wish to strengthen cooperation with the U.S., a Mexican General declared that cooperation is taking place and will take place regardless of formal institutions.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, even when information is released on the training of personnel, there are at times discrepancies between the numbers of participants reported by the Ministries of Navy and Defence and those reported by US institutions. For example, according to the information provided by the two ministries to the daily *El Universal*, only 13 Mexican military personnel had participated in the newly established Counter-Terrorism Fellowship Programme. According to the numbers provided by the U.S. State Department, the number is 237.<sup>26</sup> In another occasion, the spokesperson for the U.S. State Department's Southern Command stated that personnel from the Mexican Navy had attended exercises in Texas in 2004, while a spokesperson from the Ministry of the Navy denied the event.<sup>27</sup> The point here is that a great deal of unofficial cooperation has taken place and it is likely to continue. The formalization of these relationships through their institutionalization could potentially make it more transparent.

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to statements made by General Alvaro Vallarta Cecena in declarations made on April 17, 2002 (*Reforma*, April 18, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> See "Militares toman en EU curso contra terrorismo," *El Universal*, January 8, 2006 and Center for International Policy, Center for International Policy (CIP), Training Data on Mexico (<http://www.ciponline.org/facts/fmtrmx.htm>).

<sup>27</sup> "Refuta México a EU sobre colaboración militar," *El Universal*, March 17, 2005.

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Admittedly, a complete openness of security relations would not be guaranteed through the establishment of formal institutions. Indeed, by definition, intelligence has to be secretive. But the institutionalization of cooperation that is already taking place on some areas, irrespective of the establishment of formal institutions, would make it easier to bring increased transparency. And although it is difficult to oversee security agencies and bring them into account, it is not impossible. For example, Canada's National Security Strategy, unveiled in April 2004, allows for the inclusion of civil-society groups in the formulation of national security policy and a mechanism of oversight, the Roundtable on Security, was established to oversee security institutions and ensure that they do not overstep their responsibilities.

Given the distrust for supranational institutions that has long existed in the U.S., the establishment of a supranational security institution is unlike to transpire. But institutionalization can nevertheless take place at a lower level. The establishment of institutionalized intra-ministerial cooperation is a feasible and viable option. The close relationship that was established between Mexico's Centre for Research on National Security and the U.S. Information Analysis and Critical Infrastructure Protection Directorate, through the creation of working groups, is an obvious starting point and their expansion to a trilateral institutionalization could be pursued. This is feasible because it is in the interest of Canada and Mexico for their borders to remain open and security relations be rendered more transparent and accountable without formal institutionalization.

### Conclusion

The coming into effect of NAFTA in 1994 crystallized the idea of North America as a regional entity. Whereas before North America referred to the United States and Canada, NAFTA appears to have expanded the definition of the continent to include Mexico. Since its enactment, NAFTA increased relations among the three countries as trade and investment increased to record levels. However, these relationships remained primarily limited to economic terms. The calls for the expansion of NAFTA made by President Fox upon coming into power, notwithstanding, Canada and the U.S. continued to see NAFTA purely as an economic agreement. The attacks of 9/11 changed fundamentally the nature of North American relations as security arose to the top of the U.S. national agenda around the defence of the 'homeland.' Relations between the U.S. and its two neighbours would therefore have to deal with security matters centrally. What we have seen, as a result, is an unprecedented level cooperation on security matters since 9/11 as both Mexico and Canada have willingly done so.

In the case of Mexico, security cooperation has even been institutionalized on some areas, a remarkable development given the country's historical reluctance to establish formal links with U.S. security institutions. Nonetheless, despite calls for the establishment of a North American 'security perimeter,' security cooperation in the post-9/11 North America has mostly evolved along the two traditional axes of North American relations: the U.S.-Canada axis and the U.S.-Mexico axis. As this chapter has attempted to show, we are far from the establishment of a formal, trilateral security structure, as security cooperation has primarily been done through bilateral agreements. The

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prospects for the establishment of such structure remain bleak as the three countries seem to have disparate national priorities.

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