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## REVIEW ESSAYS

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### POLICY AND PRESCRIPTION IN U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS

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- U.S.-MEXICAN TRADE RELATIONS: FROM THE GENERALIZED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES TO A FORMAL BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT.* By Gustavo del Castillo V. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1985. Pp. 27. \$6.50.)
- OIL AND MEXICAN FOREIGN POLICY.* By George W. Grayson. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988. Pp. 207. \$19.95.)
- PLANNING THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER METROPOLIS: TRANSBOUNDARY POLICY OPTIONS FOR THE SAN DIEGO-TIJUANA REGION.* Edited by Lawrence A. Herzog. (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1986. Pp. 108. \$13.50.)
- PARTNERS IN CONFLICT: THE UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA.* By Abraham F. Lowenthal. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. Pp. 239. \$19.95.)
- TROUBLESOME BORDER.* By Oscar J. Martínez. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988. Pp. 177. \$22.95.)
- LIMITS TO FRIENDSHIP: THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO.* By Robert A. Pastor and Jorge G. Castaneda. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988. Pp. 516. \$24.45.)
- REGIONAL IMPACTS OF U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS.* Edited by Ina Rosenthal-Urey. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1986. Pp. 154. \$15.00.)
- MEXICO: CHAOS ON OUR DOORSTEP.* By Sol W. Sanders. (Boston, Mass.: Madison Books, 1986. Pp. 222. \$18.95.)

*MEXICO, NEIGHBOR IN TRANSITION.* By Peter H. Smith. (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1984. Pp. 79. \$3.00.)

*THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO.* By Josefina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Pp. 220. \$29.00.)

If scholarly output were the sole measure, an impartial observer might be tempted to conclude that the 1980s represented a watershed of sorts in U.S.-Mexican relations. The works under review are but a sampling of the literature recently issued by universities and research institutions aimed at analyzing or understanding aspects of the bilateral web. A profusion of literature has been produced in the past decade, driven by heightened U.S. sensitivities to bilateral economic relations, migration, oil, drugs, stirrings of significant political change in Mexico, and changing demographics along the shared border. An increase in the number of research institutions devoted to the study of Mexico and bilateral affairs has accentuated this trend, testifying to the rapid institutionalization of this scholarly domain.

A substantial portion of this new literature (most of it, in fact) is policy-oriented, aimed at influencing public opinion and drawing out policy prescriptions for improving bilateral relations between the United States and Mexico. As in the past, much of the work comes from the pens of historians, political scientists, economists, and journalists, although a multidisciplinary perspective tends to prevail. What is new, I would argue, is greater descriptive breadth, attentiveness to a broader range of issues, heightened sensitivity to the domestic processes of decision making in both countries, and more attention to the underlying social processes that shape bilateral issues and prospects for their solution. Contrasting with past scholarship is the growing perception that the relationship is changing rapidly.<sup>1</sup>

Although the works under review are merely a partial list of recent scholarship on U.S.-Mexican affairs, they are sufficient in number and scope to explore some of the more important aspects of the policy debate over U.S.-Mexican relations. This review essay will examine the new literature for what it adds to general understanding of the causes and underlying conditions of the "new era" in bilateral affairs and for what it prescribes for managing the changing relationship.

### *Macropolicy: The United States and Mexico in an Era of Change*

More than half the volumes under review attempt to evaluate the policy relationship between the two countries, in whole or in part. Undergirding this preoccupation is the perception that bilateral relations are entering a new era of amplified tension and increasing conflict. Nearly all

the analysts agree that this new era is challenging conventional ways of coping with bilateral relations and raising the stakes of policy failure. It will require new approaches to bilateral management. At issue, then, are diagnosis of the underlying causes of the changing shape of the relationship, assessment of conditions contributing to the current problematic, and prescription for policy change.

As to basic determinants of change, one finds surprisingly little disagreement. Beyond the enduring facts of economic asymmetry and geographic contiguity, most analysts locate the sources of change in the growing interpenetration of the Mexican and U.S. economies, the greater complexity and proliferation of transnational linkages among binational actors, and Mexico's increased strategic significance for the United States. Some variations occur in assessments of how these changes are contextualized and interpreted.

Of the works under review, Abraham Lowenthal's chapter on Mexico in *Partners in Conflict*, his survey of U.S.–Latin American relations, most explicitly situates the problematic of U.S.–Mexican affairs within a hemispheric and global framework. Lowenthal argues that the United States should rethink its Latin American policy in view of the significant structural transformation of region over the last three decades. Latin America's economic development, its greater integration into the world economy, and diversification of its foreign relations all spell declining American hegemony in the region.

U.S. relations with Mexico must be evaluated in this context. No other country in the hemisphere is as closely linked to the United States as Mexico. Profound structural changes in Mexico—including demographic growth, economic development, and social and institutional transformation—have meant greater interpenetration and complexity in bilateral relations. Mexico's basic importance to the United States has increased, but the United States has been slow to respond to this shift. Considering the economic asymmetry, geographic contiguity, and dissimilar national traditions and interests between the two countries, such changes portend intensified conflict.

Although few of the authors under review would dispute Lowenthal's thesis, the thrust of their treatments is bilateral rather than global. For example, Peter Smith's short monograph on Mexico, part of the Foreign Policy Association's Headline Series, emphasizes recent structural change in Mexican politics and economy as an imminent challenge for the bilateral relationship. George Grayson's detailed analysis of the impact of oil development on Mexico's foreign policy since 1970 dwells on the changing political economy of oil and the debt crisis as major forces in the new relationship.

It is interesting to note, in view of the Reagan administration's recent stress on East-West relations, that only Sol Sanders gives that

perspective any real weight as a structural factor shaping the relationship between the United States and Mexico. As suggested by his title, *Mexico: Chaos on Our Doorstep*, Sanders's main concern is political instability in Mexico. By his account, Mexico is poised on the brink of domestic turmoil and thus represents a major strategic threat to U.S. interests. According to Sanders, Mexico's current problems are largely attributable to the socialist tendency in Mexican government. This anticommunist animus unfortunately diminishes whatever other merits Sanders's treatment may have and prevents him from considering the possible implications of a reduction in East-West tensions for U.S.–Mexican affairs.

As structural factors at the global and bilateral level are reshaping the relationship, dissimilar cultural and historical experiences contribute to the difficulties of its management. Perceptual differences, in particular, contribute to a wide gap in bilateral communications that is part of the structural problematic, exacerbating the potential for conflict. Robert Pastor's and Jorge Castaneda's superb commentary on U.S.–Mexican relations, *Limits to Friendship* (really two books in one inasmuch as it includes U.S. and Mexican perspectives on various issues written by each co-author), explores the way that divergence in national experience has affected the issues as well as the conduct of bilateral relations. Whether it is Mexico's historically founded sensitivity to American intervention in its internal affairs or the United States' systematic failure to appreciate the social and cultural impact of its international presence, discrepant values often lie at the root of different issue priorities, protocols, and procedures that confound mutual understanding.

Policy mechanics are fundamental to the problem. As Peter Smith observes in *Mexico, Neighbor in Transition*, "the United States still does not have a coherent and substantive policy towards Mexico . . ." (p. 72). Despite various efforts to bring coherence and discipline to the conduct of bilateral affairs, the relationship continues to be managed mainly on an issue-by-issue basis. The proliferation of bilateral ties and interests is a centrifugal force that diminishes executive capacity to shape policy and amplifies the potential for bilateral confusion and conflict. Apart from simple neglect, this diffusion of policy authority is grounded in the basic decentralization of U.S. policy-making and a trend toward dispersion of actual, as opposed to formal, policy authority in Mexico.

If "adhocracy" prevails in managing bilateral affairs, most critics also fault negotiating strategies and tactics. Running through these studies is a debate over linkage. Similarly at issue is the effectiveness of either nation's means of exerting influence over the other. Various authors, Grayson and Castaneda particularly, find fault with Mexico's single-minded absorption with the U.S. State Department as its basic leverage point on the American government. Castaneda also blames the United

States for adopting a patronizing attitude in bilateral discussions and cloaking its own agenda in the mantle of Mexico's national interest.

Central to all these problems, critics argue, is the lack of a common vision of what the relationship between Mexico and the United States should be. In fact, little domestic consensus can be found in either country on a normative model that would guide bilateral policy-making. In the 1950s, at least some support existed on both sides of the border for a "special relationship," the very notion of which was never sufficiently clear to provide adequate policy guidance, as Castaneda observes (p. 128). Whatever it meant, the "special relationship" had largely expired in the minds of bilateral policymakers by 1970. Unfortunately, it left no substitute. In the United States, at least, various alternatives have been advanced since that time: dealing with Mexico in the context of a globalist framework, devoting special attention to Mexico within a globalist framework, and addressing Mexico on a special or preferential basis.<sup>2</sup> Unable to agree on any of these approaches, U.S. officials have opted for a special attention approach by default, as Pastor observes (p. 107).

Such recourse is also true of recent scholarly prescription for managing the relationship, judging from the literature under review here. Most of the analysts cited thus far reject a globalist model in view of the level of structural interdependence and mutual strategic relevance, yet they also reject any return to the special relationship. On a scale of possibilities, little remains but some variation of the special attention approach as a framework for managing the relationship.

Within these limits, there is still plenty of room for policy debate. Pastor and Castaneda, while often at odds with each other as to specific solutions on various substantive issues, argue trenchantly for giving the U.S.–Mexico relationship much higher priority, presumably within a special attention framework. They argue that bridging the perceptual gap must accompany any long-term improvement in bilateral relations. To that end, they recommend that both countries invest more in public education and upgrade their media coverage of the other country. Mexico in particular is urged to place its case more aggressively before the American public. Pastor and Castaneda also ask that both countries clarify their motives as they negotiate with each other. The United States should be more candid and less patronizing in pressing its interests on Mexico, while Mexico should abandon its feigned indifference to U.S. pressure and demand concessions in exchange. Pastor and Castaneda counsel further that both countries should revise their diplomatic tactics to fit the political rules of play in the other country, with the United States reducing its ministerial profile in Mexico and Mexico making better use of the multiple leverage points essential to exerting influence in the decentralized milieu of American politics.

While Pastor and Castaneda draw back from prescribing a revamp-

ing of administrative machinery already in place, Castaneda argues for a new executive-coordinating mechanism on the order of the U.S. National Security Council as a means of rationalizing the policy options presented to the Mexican president and mediating bureaucratic conflicts on foreign policy on the president's behalf. Finally, both analysts recognize the potential utility of nongovernmental advisory mechanisms as adjuncts to official channels in managing the relationship.

These recommendations are supported to varying degrees in the analyses of Lowenthal, Smith, and Grayson. Operating likewise within a similar framework of "special attention," Lowenthal leans toward the globalist end of the spectrum: "The best U.S. approach towards Mexico might not be a Mexican policy at all but rather an overall U.S. stance towards Latin America and, indeed, towards advanced developing countries in general" (p. 100). The United States could improve its relations with advanced developing countries by insuring that adequate flows of capital move in their direction from the commercial banks and multilateral finance agencies, by putting its own fiscal house in order (reducing its deficit and dampening upward pressure on interest rates), and by resisting ever-present protectionist pressures at home. Smith's prescriptions, like those of Lowenthal, concentrate more on substantive recommendations than on process. Smith nevertheless argues that U.S. officials "should give Mexico a fairly free hand and . . . refrain from public criticism of Mexican foreign policy" (p. 73). Grayson reviews Mexico's performance in influencing U.S. energy policy and concludes that Mexico could enhance its capacity for influence by more effective lobbying of U.S. decision makers. He suggests that a more activist Mexican embassy in Washington might diminish the U.S. ambassador's need for a high profile in Mexico City (p. 171).

The sharpest dispute on approaches to managing the relationship is found on the issue of negotiating strategy. As several analysts acknowledge, the habit of delinking issues and approaching them on an ad hoc basis is deeply grounded in the asymmetries of the U.S.-Mexico relationship and is reinforced by bureaucratic tendencies in policy-making in both countries, but mainly those in the United States. Coupled with these historic structural elements are proliferating nongovernmental or sub-governmental ties transecting the boundary that play an increasingly important role in the expanding bilateral policy arena. Such ties are less amenable to government-to-government negotiation and control.

The debate over linkage is joined most forcefully by Grayson on one side and Pastor and Castaneda on the other. For Grayson, the complexity and asymmetry of the relationship augers poorly for linking dissimilar issues in a "package deal" that would trade off concessions in the various issue-areas: "as attractive as a package deal between the two countries might seem, keeping each issue in its own channel will prove

more effective in handling an increasingly complex bilateral agenda" (p. 172). Arguing along functionalist lines, Grayson asserts that segmentation helps depoliticize the handling of bilateral issues by involving middle-level specialists rather than politicians in the search for solutions, by insulating discussions from media scrutiny, and by compartmentalizing disputes so that failure in one arena does not spill over and contaminate progress in another.

Challenging this perspective, Pastor and Castaneda propose just such a "package deal." They argue that the time has come "to consider a package deal that would involve major concessions and demands by both nations in trade, energy, intelligence and security, debt, capital flight, and immigration" (p. 370). Although great political risks are entailed, recent changes in leadership on both sides of the border and the manifest shortcomings of the prevailing ad hoc, segmented approach make a package deal worth exploring, even if "the chances of success are small" (p. 370).

While there is something to be said for exploring alternative paths toward improving the relationship, Grayson's assessment rests on firmer ground. Several arguments, most of them well articulated by Pastor and Castaneda themselves, underscore this point. First, the merit of Pastor and Castaneda's thesis hinges on the political capacity of the two presidents to execute a package deal. Even assuming (in a very large leap of faith) that they were willing to take the political risks associated with placing the relationship at or near the top of their foreign-policy agenda, legislative and bureaucratic impediments remain. Such an agreement would surely require formalization to be palatable in each country, a process that increases chances for derailing the initiative. Skirting these problems would likely require whittling the deal down so far that it would hardly be worth the expenditure of the political capital envisioned. In short, Pastor and Castaneda's argument commits what might be called the "presidential fallacy" by overstating the reach of executive influence.

Second, part of their argument turns on the recognition that secular forces are implacably driving the two countries in the direction of greater economic integration. Such a trend is viewed by many Mexican intellectuals as a threat to Mexico's sovereignty and cultural integrity, a case that is energetically argued in Castaneda and the fine short history of U.S.-Mexican relations by Josefina Zoraida Vázquez and Lorenzo Meyer, *The United States and Mexico*. But an argument can be made that Mexico's best interest lies in some arrangement that both regulates the process and buys concessions for Mexico in doing so. The problem here is that a "satisficing" approach, however pragmatic, is not likely to satisfy nationalistic expectations in Mexico. Objectively, Mexico has much to fear from economic integration. Even so, that point is not the critical one. The issue is that Mexican leaders perceive it to be so, as Gustavo del Castillo makes



abundantly clear in his useful study, *U.S.–Mexican Trade Relations: From the Generalized System of Preferences to a Formal Bilateral Trade Agreement*. In short, subjective perceptions shape reality. Such views are structurally rooted and bound up in the very construction of national identity. It is therefore extremely doubtful that national executives can break through this barrier in the short or medium term. The expediency of accepting the limitations represented by these values and perceptions is apt to be far more compelling.

*Micropolicy: The Subnational Dimension*

Thus far this review has concentrated on the analysis of the changing shape of the relationship at the nation-to-nation level and the management debate it has inspired. Yet implicit within these discussions are questions about the extent to which the evolving relationship is actually amenable to management at the level of the national governments. Several of the more focused studies on the list are especially helpful in this area.

As discussed above, an expanding sphere of subgovernment and intersocietal contacts has become a defining feature of the new relationship. Such relations have not typically occupied space at the top of the bilateral policy agenda. Yet they are beginning to attract the attention of policymakers and scholars if only because they seem to be proliferating rapidly and challenging conventional notions of what can and should be managed at the national level.

Microdiplomatic and intersocietal relations are the subject of the works by Rosenthal-Urey, Martínez, and Herzog. The Rosenthal-Urey collection, *Regional Impacts of U.S.–Mexican Relations*, centers specifically on the regional effects of binational affairs. In her introductory essay, Ina Rosenthal-Urey observes that the traditional nation-to-nation emphasis in scholarship on bilateral affairs has distorted understanding of the intersocietal relationships that give form to the so-called issues in the relationship. She argues that in fact, the “substance of relations between the two countries consists of complex systems of exchange that link specific subnational regions, non-governmental institutions, and private actors in each country” (p. 1).

The virtues of the essays in *Regional Impacts*, in contrast with several of the more explicitly policy-oriented volumes above, lie in identifying structural constraints on management at the national level. Two themes run through the essays. The first stresses the importance of subnational actors as fundamental determinants of national policy. Whether speaking of regional development in the Mexicali Valley or technology transfer in the Mexican Bajío, these essays demonstrate the manifold ways in which the purposes of binational policymakers are mediated and re-



shaped by subnational interests. A second theme stresses the unanticipated externalities of binational policy-making. As several of the contributors to this volume take pains to argue, today's binational problems are often as not the failures of yesterday's bilateral solutions.

The constraints incumbent on national-level management of the relationship are especially apparent in the issue-area of border relations. The so-called border issues encompass a wide field of public policy and make up a complex binational agenda in themselves. Driven by rapid demographic growth and an increasingly interdependent economy, communities along the U.S.-Mexican border are finding themselves on the cutting edge of a significant long-term process of policy devolution. This process, which some international relations scholars have recently termed "paradiplomacy,"<sup>3</sup> results from several factors: geographic contiguity, the formal subdivision of federal authority (aspects of which favor asserting local authority in binational management), the social and physical ecology of transboundary communities, and issues of special salience for the border communities.

The two volumes by historian Oscar Martínez and urbanologist Lawrence Herzog provide much evidence of this process. Martínez's *Troublesome Border*, one of a series of fine volumes on Mexican affairs now being published by the University of Arizona Press under the auspice of PROFMEX, tracks the evolution of the borderlands as a sociocultural and juridically distinct region. As border society has grown, the range of locally situated binational concerns has proliferated. In the process, a distinctive identity and unique forms of regional articulation into national and binational processes have evolved. In the border arena, where federal governments are frequently perceived as the problem rather than the solution, the scope for federal management of border-situated conflicts is often limited. Whether by local assertion or federal default, binational communities have increasingly taken the lead in border diplomacy.

An important case in point is the greater Tijuana-San Diego metropolitan zone. Straddling the international boundary, this conurbation of more than two million souls must cope with a host of problems that fall outside the formal scope of federal authority or at best interface with federal government in indirect and jurisdictionally complex ways. Problems of land-use planning, fire prevention, pollution, law enforcement, traffic regulation, and health care require binational solutions. But federal authorities in Mexico City and Washington often lack the interest, the authority, or the resources to deal with such issues. The resulting vacuum is filled by local initiative.

Recognizing this slippage, federal agencies in both countries have sought in the past decade to expand the scope of local involvement in federal decision making through consultative committees, working groups, task forces, and other ad hoc arrangements. Such innovation has begun to

bridge both the local-federal and binational perceptual gaps in policy-making but is still structurally deficient in allocating formal policy authority downward to border localities. This trend is detailed in the commentaries of local-level and federal officials in the Herzog volume, *Planning the International Border Metropolis: Transboundary Policy Options for the San Diego–Tijuana Region*. While border communities on both sides continue to depend partly on federal resources to solve their pressing binational problems, they are energetically exploring a number of unprecedented approaches to binational management—from new departments of inter-urban relations to proposals for regional economic development commissions and quasi-autonomous transboundary planning authorities. Clearly, further devolution of policy authority is in the offing.

Thus what is emerging along the U.S.–Mexican border is a complex set of intergovernmental and intersocietal relationships in which old approaches to bilateral management are being modified rapidly to accommodate the new structural realities of greater social and economic interdependence. The borderlands, in microcosm, may well prefigure trends in the larger bilateral relationship as it moves into the twenty-first century. Such developments are genuinely new and will bear the close scrutiny of scholars and policymakers interested in the future of the relationship. While many of the enduring problems of U.S.–Mexican relations are likely to persist (as is argued by Pastor, Castaneda, Grayson, Lowenthal, and others), such innovative, frequently subnational, and nongovernmental relations may well have a strong grip on the key to managing bilateral affairs in this new era of conflict and change.

In sum, the volumes reviewed here herald a new era in bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States. From both macro and micro approaches as well as various disciplinary perspectives, they provide an important look at current and emerging challenges for binational diplomacy. Given the advantages of hindsight, it is perhaps no surprise that converging explanations of the binational predicament are matched by diverging prescriptions for change.

What is evident is that interdependence and policy complexity are reaching qualitatively new levels in U.S.–Mexican affairs. At the level of their sovereign governments, such trends are naturally troubling. Yet solutions are already emerging along the border, in intersocietal relations, and elsewhere. If a grand-package solution to the management predicament is not in the cards, the contours of a new, more sophisticated, and diffuse relationship are already emerging. In this new era, as San Diego City Councilman Uvaldo Martínez observes, managing the relationship will require “trading off optimal solutions for those that are feasible” (cited by Martínez in Herzog, p. 71). Such management will involve the participation of a great many nontraditional actors in the bilateral scheme and will surely require leadership and vision as well.

## NOTES

1. In the 1960s, historian Howard Cline could write, "No real issues—political, economic, social—currently disturb what amount to routine diplomatic relations." His sanguine assessment contrasts sharply with the conflict- and change-laden discourse of contemporary students of the relationship. See Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (New York: Atheneum, 1965).
2. Richard E. Feinberg, "Bureaucratic Organization and United States Policy towards Mexico," in *Mexico-United States Relations*, edited by Susan K. Purcell (New York: Praeger, 1981), 32-42.
3. See, for instance, Ivo D. Duchacek, *The Territorial Dimension of Politics: Within, among, and between Nations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986); and *Perforated Sovereignties and International Relations*, edited by Ivo Duchacek, Daniel Latouche, and Garth Stevenson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1988).