



# The Anatomy of a Relationship:

A Collection of Essays  
on the Evolution of  
U.S.-Mexico  
Cooperation on  
Border  
Management



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## About the Collection

The conventional wisdom among those who study the border is that following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States unilaterally imposed significant additional security requirements on the management of the U.S.-Mexico border, and that the measures taken to meet these requirements have made the border more difficult to cross for not only illicit but also licit traffic, including the trade and travel that is the lifeblood of cross-border communities. There is a great deal of truth in this interpretation, but it largely portrays Mexico as a passive receptor of U.S. policy, which could not be further from the truth.

Rather, the increasing relevance of transnational non-state actors—terrorist groups, organized crime networks—posing border and national security threats in the region have demanded increased international cooperation to monitor and mitigate the threats. At the same time, the U.S. and Mexican economies have become ever more deeply integrated, causing significant growth in cross-border traffic and placing the efficient management of the U.S.-Mexico border as a first-order national interest for both countries.

The post-2001 border management framework has pushed away from the traditional understanding of the border as a line in the sand and moved toward an approach that seeks to secure and (in the case of licit travel and commerce) facilitate flows. This focus on transnational flows has expanded the geographic scope of what were traditionally border operations and thus required an internationalization of border management, the development of partnerships and cooperative methods of border administration.

Mexico historically took a largely hands-off approach to its northern border, with virtually no entry processing required for the majority of travelers and a limited law enforcement focus on the border itself. After September, 2001, the U.S. sought cooperation from its allies in protecting the homeland, which in the case of Mexico predominately focused on the border. Mexico responded by offering support for U.S. security objectives, but also pressured for the creation of mechanisms to limit the economic and quality of life costs of increased security. More recently, Mexico has reciprocated by pushing for increased U.S. action to stop the southbound flows of weapons trafficking and illicit bulk cash.

At the U.S.-Mexico border, these changes meant that Mexico necessarily and for the first time fully got a seat at the table in discussions of border management. It took several years for the development to be fully institutionalized, but it was achieved through the formal creation of the Executive Steering Committee (with leadership in the White House and Los Pinos) and related binational committees for various aspects of border management in 2010 as part of the 21st Century Border initiative. Similarly, through the Merida Initiative, Mexico and the United States have jointly sought to strengthen public security in the border region, and through the High Level Economic Dialogue aimed to cooperatively strengthen the competitiveness of the regional economy.

Over the past decade and a half, the United States and Mexico have transitioned from largely independent and unconnected approaches to managing the border to the development and implementation of a cooperative framework. With contributions from government officials and other top experts in the field, this collection of essays explores the development of cooperative approaches to the management of the U.S.-Mexico border. The essays will be released individually throughout the fall of 2015 and published as a volume in early 2016.

The Mexico Institute would like to thank each of the contributors for sharing their expertise and experience. They include Assistant Secretary Alan D. Bersin and Michael D. Huston of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; Sergio M. Alcocer from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Managing Director Gerónimo Gutiérrez of the North American Development Bank, David A. Shirk from the University of San Diego (and a Wilson Center Global Fellow); Carlos Heredia of El Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas; and Carlos de la Parra of El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

# AN OVERVIEW OF U.S.-MEXICO BORDER RELATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

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Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S.-Mexico border has been many things to many people: a frontier, a scar, a line, a liability, a threat, and an opportunity. Depending on one's vantage and frame of reference, the border is any or all of these at once. Perhaps above all, the border is emblematic of the U.S.-Mexico relationship, which has changed dramatically over the span of more than a century and a half. This essay provides an analysis of the evolution of U.S.-Mexico border relations, with a broad overview that divides the history of the relationship into five distinct periods corresponding to different modes of interaction seen in borderlands throughout the world.

## UNDERSTANDING U.S.-MEXICO BORDER SECURITY RELATIONS

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### *A Framework*

The U.S.-Mexico border is among the most iconic and widely studied interstate boundaries in the world. Like the Berlin Wall, the Straits of Gibraltar, the Korean Demilitarized Zone, the India-Pakistan border, and the Triple Frontier of South America, the U.S.-Mexico border is a powerful symbol of history and politics. As in these other border systems, or "border regimes," the U.S.-Mexico border region has been shaped by the historical evolution of the two adjoining countries and their relationships to one another.

To understand the nature of the U.S.-Mexico border relationship today, it is useful to draw on a comparative framework that helps to understand the fundamental nature of borders, such as the one developed two decades ago by University of Arizona

professor Oscar Martínez in his 1994 book *Border People*. Martínez's typology characterizes the different types of relationships found in borderlands as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) *Alienated borderlands*: Borders that suffer from significant political and territorial conflicts between two or more neighboring states, which may still be in a process of nation-building and military expansionism.
- 2) *Coexistent borderlands*: Borders between neighboring states that generally recognize and respect each other's sovereignty, and where cordial international relationships develop.
- 3) *Interdependent borderlands*: Borders between neighboring nation-states that recognize the mutual benefits to be gained through bi-national cooperation, and achieve significant openness in cross-border relations.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) *Integrated borderlands*: Borders between neighboring nation-states that have surrendered a significant degree of sovereignty in favor of gains from trade, economies of scale, and greater social, cultural, legal, and political assimilation.

*"The U.S.-Mexico border is a powerful symbol of history and politics."*

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<sup>2</sup> See Table 1. *Typology of Border Relationships from State Formation to Greater Regional Integration* on Page 12.

<sup>3</sup> For example, when there is relative parity between neighboring states, a kind of "security community" may develop. This opens the possibility of strategic cooperation in mutual defense, and reduces the need to mobilize the state's coercive forces at its borders. Emanuel Adler and Michael N. Barnett, *Security Communities*. (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Alex J. Bellamy, *Security Communities and Their Neighbours: Regional Fortresses or Global Integrators?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).



While not necessarily a linear progression, Martínez contends that there has tended to be progress over time across different countries border relationships as they go through a prolonged period of adjustment and accommodation. For Martínez, and others who study integration, economic processes and trade relations are a key driver of the process of integration, as the nationalist impulses that give rise to borders in the first place are overcome by the power of markets.<sup>4</sup>

It might be noted that politics and culture are important, as well. For example, the sudden democratization of Eastern European countries had enormous consequences for their border relationships with the West. Likewise, a country's changing demographic makeup, perhaps through increased immigration, may lead to newfound societal tolerance and possibly improved attitudes toward a neighboring country, albeit over the course time.

What is also key to understand is that borders are a reflection of the nation-state itself, and not solely reflective of the relationships between countries. That is, a nation-state's evolution and internal transformations greatly affect its borders and border relationships. On the one hand, the progression of states toward greater coexistence, interdependence, and even integration reflects the maturation of those states, both politically and economically. On the other hand, such progress is not inevitable, as border relationships can

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<sup>4</sup> Developed mostly in the European context—and with a backdrop of Soviet integration and the development of NATO—Jacob Viner (1950), Jan Tinbergen (1954), Ernst Haas (1958), Bela Balassa (1961), Joseph Nye (1971) also propose theories of broader economic, political, and security integration. Generally speaking, these follow a similar progression along the lines of Martínez's framework for U.S.-Mexico border relations.

deteriorate, sometimes quickly, if there are sudden changes within either state it can affect the inter-state relationship.

As I discuss below, the history of the U.S.-Mexico border relationship has shown tremendous progress in this regard, as both countries have experienced significant and positive changes that have facilitated greater cross-border interdependence and even a certain degree of integration. However, there have been—and may well be in the future—setbacks that can negatively affect U.S.-Mexico border relations, and the state of the border. Nonetheless, in the post-9/11 era, both the United States and Mexico have opportunities for continued development as nation-states in ways that are likely to improve the overall U.S.-Mexico relationship, facilitating continued progress toward greater cross-border cooperation and integration.

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## ALIENATION AND CONFLICT

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### *The U.S.-Mexico Border in the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century*

Like many nation-state boundaries around the world, the U.S.-Mexico border was born out of competition and conflict. After a prolonged struggle from 1810 to 1821,

Mexico finally succeeded in gaining its independence from Spain. Ironically, Spain and the United States had just signed the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, ceding Florida to the United States after its annexation in 1810 and finalizing the border between the United States and the insurgent colony of New Spain. After independence, Mexico ratified the Adams-Onís Treaty under the Treaty of Limits in 1828. Still, there were border tensions that lingered for the next two decades, leading eventually to the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1836 and the loss of additional Mexican territory through the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846-48.

For many years following that conflict, the border was a kind of scar that festered from neglect and often became a source of irritation for both countries. With the U.S. expansion westward, many Mexicans now found themselves living in U.S.-held territories and subject to the confiscation of their private property and severe discriminatory treatment, including hundreds of lynchings of Mexicans and Mexican Americans that stretched from the mid-1800s into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly along the border.<sup>5</sup> The loss of the country's northern territories to the United States has often provoked a sense of indignity and resentment among Mexicans.

Thus, in contemporary U.S.-Mexico relations it is essential to bear in mind Mexican sensitivities and sensibilities about U.S. impositions on Mexico, as well as Mexican Americans' sentiments about the harms and indignities they have suffered historically. That said, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were important periods of

rapprochement and direct collaboration between the two countries. Notably, the United States provided support to the Liberal forces led by Mexican President Benito Juárez against Conservatives supported by the French in Mexico's mid-century civil war, or War of Reform (1857–1861).<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, as President Lincoln dealt with the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), Mexico's efforts to repel the French prevented Emperor Napoleon III from offering stronger support to U.S. confederate rebels.

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Despite its strategic importance for both countries, during this period, the U.S.-Mexico border was of little economic or political importance in either country. Sparsely populated, hot, and arid, the border region was a rugged landscape with relatively few human settlements. Economic activity in the border region was centered on ranching, small-scale agriculture, and mining, where possible. Given the limited trade and commerce between the two countries—and the virtual absence of transportation infrastructure—most of the

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<sup>5</sup> William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, “Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928,” New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in the Battle of Antón Lizardo in 1860, the United States deployed the USS Saratoga and two steamers to thwart the forces of Conservative naval commander Tomas Marín from taking the port of Veracruz. Later, after the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War and Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson continued to provide Mexico with vital support that helped to defeat the Conservatives and restore control under Juárez's Liberal government.

border region was not particularly vital to either nation's economy. In this sense, the U.S.-border would change dramatically in the next phase of the relationship.

## TOWARD COEXISTENCE

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From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S.-Mexico relations entered into a period of more stable coexistence and cooperation, albeit amid times of enormous turbulence in both countries. During this time, the two countries hosted the first international summit between a U.S. and Mexican head of state, as President William Taft (1909-1913) met with President Porfirio Díaz Mori (1876-1910) on the border in El Paso-Ciudad Juárez in 1909. For nearly three decades, Díaz had welcomed increased trade and investment from the United States, as well as Europe, and pushed forward an ambitious agenda to open and modernize Mexico. Under Díaz's government, U.S. companies became heavily invested in the country, particularly in mining and manufacturing, laying the foundations of future economic cooperation.

However, at the same time, there was considerable discontent and unrest among labor and agrarian interests in both the United States and Mexico. As a result of their dissatisfaction, there were a series of violent outbreaks in both countries during this period, including labor strikes, riots, and serious political violence: the assassination of U.S. President McKinley in 1901 and a massive social revolution in Mexico from 1910-1917. The Mexican Revolution, in particular, had major consequences for people living along the border, since it became an important theater of conflict and activities for Mexican revolutionaries.

The early 1900s were also a time of great concern in the United States over the border and the problem of immigration, though not necessarily Mexican migration per se. In 1915, primarily as a result of newfound concerns about the large tide of immigrants—particularly Asians—accumulating in the Western and Southwestern portion of the country, the United States first began to attempt to regulate and control its border with Mexico through mounted patrols. The foundations of the modern U.S. border security apparatus, most notably, the U.S. Border Patrol founded in 1924, were developed during this period.

Arguably, because power changed hands multiple times over the course of the Mexican revolution, true co-existence between the two countries was not possible until after hostilities died down. The United States was sufficiently sensitive about its relationship with Mexico that, in late February 1917, the revelation of the Zimmerman Telegraph—a clandestine communique in which Germany promised to enable Mexico “to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona”—helped trigger U.S. involvement in World War I a few weeks later.<sup>7</sup> The United States delayed recognizing Mexico's new government, and did so only after the country's new revolutionary leaders pledged to respect the right of U.S. oil companies under the 1923 Bucareli Agreement. A little more than a decade later, a new government in Mexico discarded the agreement and began to expropriate international oil companies, prompting significant tensions with the United States and Great Britain.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. National Archive, “Zimmermann Telegram - Decoded Message,” Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State, 1756 – 1979, Identifier Number 302022, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1917.



The Depression Era of the 1930s also sparked a major backlash against Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwestern corridor of the United States, as half a million people—including hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens of Mexican American descent—were forcibly removed in the Mexican Repatriation.<sup>8</sup>

World War II helped to bring the countries closer together, dramatically transforming the U.S.-Mexico border region, and in some ways helped to improve the circumstances of Mexican Americans. During the war, despite domestic ambivalence and a desire to charter a neutral course, Mexico joined the United States and other Allied Powers in declaring war on the Axis Alliance.<sup>9</sup> Cross-border trade in oil and metals supported the U.S. war effort, thousands of Mexicans joined the U.S. Armed Forces, and Mexico sent over 300 pilots and aircrew to the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Along the Western border, Mexico and the United States established posts to guard against a possible Japanese attack, with many of these historic lookout stations along the U.S. border installation remaining

intact even today at Border Field State Park, California.

The impact of World War II on the border region was enormous. Building on Depression-era works projects—like the Hoover Dam—the United States poured enormous federal resources into the development of its military capabilities in the southwest to support combat efforts in the Pacific. Meanwhile, to help address manpower shortages during the war years, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans were recruited to come to the United States through the Bracero Program, a temporary guest worker program that lasted from 1945 into the early 1960s. The termination of the Bracero Program in 1964 was accompanied by a major shift in U.S. immigration policy. The U.S. Congress approved the Family Reunification Act, which radically changed the criteria for immigration to the United States by emphasizing family connections as a basis for residency and citizenship. Without special provisions to accommodate Mexican laborers, tens of thousands of Braceros began the exodus back to Mexico via the border.

The return of many Braceros, led Mexico to develop the Border Industrialization Program that fostered the so-called *maquiladora* or in-bond industry, which imported foreign components for assembly and export back to the United States. The special form of “in-bond” manufacturing enticed producers, allowing the duty-free import of unassembled parts, and taxing only the value added by relatively inexpensive Mexican labor. In recent years, more than 3,000 firms in the maquiladora sector make up a \$120 billion industry (accounting for nearly half of the nation’s exports) that provides jobs for over 1.6 million Mexican workers (over 137,500 in Tijuana, or roughly a third of the city’s

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin R. Johnson, “The Forgotten Repatriation of Persons of Mexican Ancestry and Lessons for the War on Terror,” Volume 26 Issue 1, *Pace Law Review*, Fall 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Mexico, along with France, was one of two non-English speaking countries that formed the Alliance, along with the Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, United States. See

<sup>10</sup> The 201<sup>st</sup> Fighter Air Squadron was formed in the wake of a German attack on Mexican oil tankers bound for the United States. The 201<sup>st</sup> joined the U.S. 58<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in the Pacific in 1945, helping to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese. Several members of the 201<sup>st</sup> died in their service to the war effort. See: Enrique Sandoval Castarrica, *Historia Oficial de la Fuerza Aerea Expedicionaria Mexicana*, Mexico City, 1945; “The Saga of the Aztec Eagles,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, July 25, 2004; and Anthony J. Kupferer, *No Glamour. No Glory! The Story of the 58<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group of World War II*. Taylor Publishing Company: Texas, 1989.

workforce), and over six billion dollars in annual wages (with approximately \$1.2 billion in Baja California).

These developments set the stage for deeper economic and social integration along the border, and between the two countries. Tensions remained. Mexico found itself playing a supporting role during the Cold War, which made many Mexicans uncomfortable in the era of anti-U.S. sentiment that pervaded throughout Latin America following the Cuban Revolution. Also, discrimination and abuse toward Mexicans and Mexican Americans remained a serious problem in United States, as it does today. But over the course of the Cold War era, the degree of tension that had been seen between Mexico and the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century softened considerably, or at least manifested more sporadically, as the two countries moved toward greater interdependence.

## **AGE OF INTERDEPENDENCE**

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### *The Globalization of the U.S.-Mexico Border*

Over the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the present, the United States and Mexico developed a much more symbiotic relationship, which manifested most immediately and most prominently along the border. The growth and transformation of the U.S. Southwest and Northern Mexico were among the most significant internal developments that either country has experienced in the postwar era. Massive population growth, urbanization, and industrial development have turned sparse, arid deserts into dynamic cities and regions of industry and commerce. This era also brought new and ever greater enforcement on the movement of immigrant labor and the trafficking of illicit drugs, both with

enormous consequences for the border region.

*“Over the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the present, the United States and Mexico developed a much more symbiotic relationship, which manifested most immediately and most prominently along the border.”*

The economic integration of Mexico and the United States during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was remarkable, and was driven by both international economic forces (e.g., fluctuating interest rates, foreign capital investment, and expanded trade flows) and domestic policies in both countries (e.g., deficit spending, deregulation, and severe currency devaluations). Whether viewed from a Keynesian or a neoliberal perspective, the post-war era was marked by an emphasis on the need for international economic cooperation. The foundation provided by the Bretton Woods System created stability for growth and commerce from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. In this context, both Mexico and the United States enjoyed remarkable economic growth and increasing trade. However, the 1970s also brought a period of economic crisis, and a turning point that led to massive changes in the economic policies of both countries over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. As the U.S. economy sputtered in the face of the oil crisis and stagflation, the Mexican economy stumbled under the weight of a massive debt crisis and runaway inflation.

Both sets of crises led to an era of unprecedented market liberalization—of currency, of industry, and of trade—that dramatically transformed the two economies and brought them closer together. While the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations

moved to reduce the role of government in the U.S. economy, Mexican presidents Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas, and Ernesto Zedillo similarly withdrew the hand of the state from economic intervention, opening the two markets in ways that created unprecedented opportunities for cross-border commerce. By 1994, Mexico joined with the United States and Canada to form the North American Free Trade Agreement, still the world's largest trading bloc after more than two decades. Meanwhile, with more than \$500 billion in cross-border commerce by 2014, Mexico is now the third largest trading partner of the United States and the second most important destination for U.S. exports.<sup>11</sup>

Amid this era of economic restructuring and growth, there were major difficulties for ordinary people. During the 1980s, free market reforms and deregulation shuttered businesses, laid off workers, drove farmers from their fields, and increased the weight of debt on U.S. and Mexican households. Moreover, in both countries, the deregulation of markets added insult to these difficulties thanks to a new era of corporate cronyism and corruption, whether in the Savings and Loan scandals of the United States or in the privatization of government-run industries in Mexico. Also, in the early 1990s, both countries suffered the effects of a serious recession and—especially, in Mexico's case—a severe currency devaluation that dramatically reduced the household budgets of ordinary people. These problems would have profound implications for both countries, especially along the border.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2015, only Canada and China had a larger total volume of trade with the United States, and only Canada surpassed Mexico in the consumption of U.S. exports. U.S. Department of Commerce.

These economic changes unleashed a massive wave of migration from Mexico to the United States that created newfound tensions between the two countries and placed particular strains on the border. Mexican migrants are drawn to the United States by the lure of jobs, but limits on the number of U.S. visas for temporary employment lead hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to enter the country without proper documentation. Beginning in the 1990s, illegal immigration from Mexico gave rise to a series of concentrated border enforcement initiatives, from Operation “Hold the Line” (also called the Blockade) in Texas to Operation “Gatekeeper” in San Diego. These enforcement efforts, while successful in lowering unauthorized immigration through urban areas, have contributed to higher death tolls for migrants who are pushed to greater extremes – crossing the border in the deserts and mountains—in their effort to find jobs on the U.S. side of the border. In recent years, U.S. border authorities also have been severely criticized for the use of lethal force against Mexican nationals crossing the border, and even several incidents in which Border Patrol agents have fired into Mexico, killing individuals south of the line.

*“...enforcement efforts, while successful in lowering unauthorized immigration through urban areas, have contributed to higher death tolls for migrants who are pushed to greater extremes – crossing the border in the deserts and mountains in their effort to find jobs on the U.S. side of the border.”*

The net results of the increased U.S. border enforcement of the past few decades are questionable. The introduction of concentrated border enforcement in the

United States has definitely created greater operational control of key corridors along the border, and has contributed to a change in undocumented migration patterns. However, concentrated border enforcement efforts have not necessarily provided sufficient deterrents to stop or reduce the flow of migration, which tends to rise or fall predominantly based on economic trends. Indeed, the rate of undocumented Mexican migration into the United States—as measured by proxy through the number of apprehensions along the Southwest Border—increased with the demand for jobs in the strong economy of the late 1990s and through most of the mid-2000s. In the late 2000s, however, migration ebbed significantly due to the global economic downturn and shifting demographic patterns in Mexico, most importantly a declining birth rate and a gradually shrinking younger population. What is clear is that Mexican migration is one of the major cross-border challenges that has accompanied the era of globalization.

Meanwhile, both countries' opening to the global economy also extended the invisible hand of capitalism to a diversified network of illicit entrepreneurs, producers, and innovators. In the new global economy, black markets thrived. Indeed, for young people aged eighteen to thirty, drug trafficking and dealing offer opportunities for a disenfranchised generation at a time of stagnant economic growth.<sup>12</sup> Mexico's rise as a drug trafficking conduit to the United

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<sup>12</sup> In Mexico, such individuals are often referred to as the *ni-ni's* because they are neither enrolled in school nor formally employed (*ni estudian, ni trabajan*). A report released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) cites that there are over seven million *ni-ni's* nationwide, 38% of which are women, though some sources put the former number as high as ten million. Eugenia Jiménez, "OCDE: México ocupa tercer sitio en *ninis*." *Milenio*. September 13, 2011.

States during the 1980s created lucrative new employment opportunities for pilots, drivers, and logistics experts; lookouts (*halcones*), enforcers, and professional hit men; accountants and financial experts; and top-level cartel executives in the drug trade.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, drug dealing similarly proliferated in the streets and bedroom communities of cities throughout the United States, with networks of both gangs and college dorm room dealers providing access to the lucrative U.S. domestic market for illicit drugs. Between these two mostly separate organized crime networks was a common obstacle: the border.

Thus, the escalation of U.S. and Mexican counter-drug efforts, beginning in the 1970s, was arguably one of the most important developments along the border—and in the bilateral relationship—during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The proliferation of the so-called War on Drugs led to both greater cooperation and newfound tensions between the two countries, particularly along the border. On the one hand, the drug war brought unprecedented forms and levels of cooperation in law enforcement and security, including the increased use of extradition, mutual legal assistance, and

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<sup>13</sup> Today, Mexican authorities estimate that there are perhaps 450,000 individuals who rely in some significant way on drug-trafficking as a source of income, and official estimates suggest that drug-trafficking activities now account for 2 to 3 percent of Mexico's more than \$1 trillion GDP. U.S. government estimates of the total profits from these activities are between \$19 billion and \$39 billion, while the Mexican government has long estimated drug profits to be around \$11 billion to \$12 billion annually; these range from 1 to 3 percent of Mexico's \$1.4 trillion GDP. A recent Rand study provides the most careful estimate available to date, placing annual Mexican drug profits from the United States, not including other revenues, at around \$6–7 billion or half a percent of GDP. See Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone* (Austin, 2009) and Kilmer et al. (2010).

cross-border prosecutions. In March 2007, Presidents Bush and Calderón agreed to dramatically expand U.S.-Mexico counter-drug cooperation at a bilateral summit in Mérida, Yucatán that led to the announcement a multi-year package of U.S. aid to help fund Mexican and Central American counter-narcotics initiatives. That aid package, known as the Merida Initiative, provided assistance to the Mexican military and domestic law enforcement in efforts to combat narco-trafficking and organized crime with greater information sharing, new equipment, technology, and training for surveillance, aerial transport, land and sea interdiction, and border security.<sup>14</sup>

*“In short, the forces of late-20<sup>th</sup> century globalization – both positive and negative – have manifested perhaps nowhere as strongly as the U.S.-Mexico border.”*

President Barack Obama continued to support Mexico’s counter-drug efforts “beyond Mérida” by expanding the framework of the Mérida Initiative to include four supporting components. These four “pillars” of U.S.-Mexico security collaboration included: (1) more intense bi-national collaboration to combat organized crime groups, (2) greater assistance to strengthen the judicial sector, (3) more effective interdiction efforts through 21<sup>st</sup> century border controls, and (4) new social programs to revitalize Mexican communities affected by crime and violence (with a particular focus on Mexican border communities).<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the Obama administration pledged to increase

its efforts to address the U.S.-side drivers of Mexico’s drug violence, with new funding to reduce illicit drug consumption and to combat illegal arms trafficking from the United States. Reflecting continued U.S. concerns about Mexico’s violence, the Obama administration also deployed additional manpower and funds to the U.S.-Mexican border in an attempt to stave off possible “spillover” violence.

The articulation of a new, shared framework for U.S.-Mexico cooperation is viewed by many as an achievement in itself. For many years, U.S. and Mexican security cooperation floundered because of mutual suspicions and a lack of agreement on basic principles.<sup>16</sup> Working in an intense, sustained, and bilateral manner to implement the Mérida Initiative, authorities from both countries have identified shared priorities, strategies, and avenues for cooperation. According to former-Calderón administration security advisor Sigrid Arzt, “the Mérida Initiative has become an umbrella for increased information sharing, data inter-operability, and the use of common systems, such as fusion centers, that create platforms for information sharing, whether through SIUs [Sensitive Intelligence Units] or BEST [Border Enforcement Security Task Force] teams.”<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S.-Mexico cooperation under the Mérida Initiative has also been criticized for having slow and bureaucratic processes for transferring aid, for a lack of effective cross-border and inter-agency coordination (including major scandals over clandestine U.S. programs to track guns and money in Mexico), and for an insufficient emphasis on monitoring performance indicators and measuring program effectiveness. At the same time, the power of organized crime

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<sup>14</sup> “Merida Initiative to Combat Illicit Narcotics and Reduce Organized Crime Authorization Act of 2008,” H.R.6028.

<sup>15</sup> Ribando Seelke and Finklea (2010).

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<sup>16</sup> Bailey and Godson, Bailey and Chabat, Bailey.

<sup>17</sup> Arzt (2010).



and problems of corruption have often proved overwhelming for both U.S. and Mexican authorities.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, as the drug war has progressed, the toll on both countries has grown. Hundreds of thousands of young men, disproportionately of African American and Latino descent, wound up behind bars on charges of possession or dealing drugs. In Mexico, a disproportionate number of young men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five were the primary casualties of the country's recent wave of organized crime-related violence, which has killed tens of thousands over the last decade.

*“Neither country can go it alone: trans-border problems require trans-border solutions.”*

In short, the forces of late-20<sup>th</sup> century globalization—both positive and negative—have manifested perhaps nowhere as strongly as along the U.S.-Mexico border. Border relations have transformed from merely coexistent to increasingly integrated and interdependent. At the same time, the contemporary security challenges posed by interdependence are necessarily more complex as a result of the difficulties of processing increased volumes of goods and people, the conflicting desire to facilitate commerce while also identifying and reducing potential threats, and the difficulties of attempting to solve problems at the border rather than at their point of

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<sup>18</sup> A number of high profile setbacks that have seriously undermined U.S.-Mexican collaboration over the past two decades including the torture and murder of DEA Agent Enrique Camarena and his Mexican pilot, Alfredo Zavala Avelar in 1985, the arrest of Mexican Drug Tsar Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo on corruption charges in 1997, the defection of members of a crack Mexican military outfit to form the “Zetas” in 2001, the release of Rafael Caro Quintero in 2014, and the escape of Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzman from a maximum security prison in 2015.

origin. Neither country can go it alone: trans-border problems require trans-border solutions.

## CONCLUSION

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### *Toward Integration? The Challenges of Post 9-11 Border Management*

What remains to be seen is whether the United States and Mexico will continue to become more interdependent to the point of what Martinez called the “integration” stage of cross-border relations. This prospect was made more difficult to imagine by terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The 9/11 attacks created a moment of national crisis and provoked an intense state of alarm within the United States, with significant implications for the management of both the U.S.-Mexican and U.S.-Canadian borders. The new security context necessitated a reexamination of existing practices and mechanisms for cross-border collaboration in law enforcement and security. Indeed, the massive restructuring of 22 federal agencies and programs—with over 180,000 government employees and an expansive and still evolving mandate for border management—under the Department of Homeland Security was the largest bureaucratic reorganization in the United States since the creation of the Department of Defense in the aftermath of World War II.

Still, in a testament to the overarching impetus toward cooperation in North America, officials from all three countries have attempted—with mixed success—to mitigate the degree to which post-9/11 border concerns have restricted trade and interactions through the border. What is clear at present, at least, is that the United States and Mexico currently have the basis for continued improvements in collaboration under existing bilateral agreements and emerging administrative structure.

**Table 1. Typology of Border Relationships from State Formation to Greater Regional Integration**

Adapted from Martinez (1998).

	<b>Nascent</b>	<b>Alienated</b>	<b>Coexistent</b>	<b>Interdependent</b>	<b>Integrated</b>
<i>Characteristics of the state</i>	Inchoate or emerging states based on topography and/or national affinity. Possible separation or emersion from imperialist arrangements.	One more political entities in the early stages of nation-state formation, or regime transformation.	Consolidated nation-state with strong expression of nationalist identity and state sovereignty.	Well-established nation-state with significant potential gains from cooperation with other states.	Nation-state sovereignty and national identity superceded by higher level political affiliations
<i>Nature of relationship between neighboring states</i>	Relations are still forming, as nation-states establish sovereignty, forge individual national identities, and consolidate territorial control.	Relations between neighboring nation-states are characterized by serious political conflicts (nationalist, religious, cultural, ethnic, or ideological).	Nation-states generally recognize and respect each other's sovereignty, lingering tensions and antagonisms between states are significantly reduced, and cordial international relationships develop.	Nation-states recognize mutual benefits of relationship, and are able to identify and realize significant areas of cooperation.	Separate nation-states recognize mutual benefits of surrendering sovereignty in favor of gains from trade, economies of scale, and greater social, political, and cultural assimilation.
<i>Border policy context</i>	Frontiers are poorly defined and therefore subject to either expansion or annexation.	Heavy militarization of nation-state borders and rigid controls over cross-border traffic and trade.	Reduced militarization of nation-state borders and greater interaction across borders, with significant controls remaining.	Significant areas of cooperation and openness in border controls, with possible tensions in areas of asymmetry.	Fading or dissolution of previously existing border controls, and transference of "border" functions to external perimeter of integrated states.
<i>Historical examples</i>	U.S.-Spain/Mexico borders (1789-1848)	U.S.-Mexico border (1848-1876)	U.S.-Mexico border (1876-1964)	U.S.-Mexico border (1964-present)	United States (1789-present)
<i>Contemporary examples</i>	Eritrea-Ethiopia border	Israel-Palestine border Iraq-Saudi Arabia border	Bolivia-Chile border	U.S.-Canada border	European Union

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. David Shirk received his undergraduate degree in International Studies from Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Political Science at the University of California, San Diego. He was a fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies from 1998-99 and 2001-2003. From 2003 to 2013, in addition to his faculty position, he served as the director of the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego. In 2009-10, Dr. Shirk was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C. He is the principal investigator for the Justice in Mexico project ([www.justiceinmexico.org](http://www.justiceinmexico.org)), a bi-national research initiative on criminal justice and the rule of law in Mexico. He is also the author or editor of seven books and numerous book chapters, articles, and reports. His recent publications include: *Armed with Impunity: Curbing Military Human Rights Abuses in Mexico*, co-authored with Catherine Daly and Kimberly Heinle (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, 2012); *La Reforma Judicial en México*, ed. with Octavio Rodríguez (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, 2012); and *Drug Violence in Mexico: Data and Analysis Through 2011*, co-authored with Octavio Rodríguez and Viridiana Ríos. (San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, 2012).