

# The Mark News

Putting Mexico on the Front Burner

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## **The Open Canada report rightly points out that Canada can't afford to forget its other southern neighbour.**

*"Mexico's per capita income is more than twice that of China and four times that of India. There is no other region in the world in which our political influence and economic interests have the same potential to expand." – from "The Hemisphere: Our North America Includes Mexico" Open Canada: A Global Positioning Strategy for a Networked Age*

It is puzzling that the bilateral relationship with Mexico has not made more headway in Canadian foreign policy circles, especially when considering the country's size and potential, its relevance for the United States, and connections across the hemisphere, as well as its relatively positive relationship with Canada since 1994.

But Mexican President Felipe Calderón's visit to Canada last May launched a number of important initiatives that have the potential to reinvigorate a bilateral relationship that had been losing momentum.

The most promising is the [Canada-Mexico Joint Action Plan](#), the roadmap that both governments have established for the coming years to take the relationship to the next level. Canada and Mexico have delineated their interactions at the bilateral, trilateral, and global levels with regard to protecting citizens, fostering competitive and sustainable economies, enhancing people-to-people exchanges, and working jointly in the world; they have also recognized the linkages between bilateral and trilateral actions.

In this new scheme, the security agenda now stands out, not only because it has been so key in North American affairs since September 11, but also because of the potential regional threat that organized crime and drug trafficking pose.

Since 2006, Canada and Mexico have come together to work on security and this co-operation is likely to continue growing. Evidence of that is found in Canada's pledge to disburse close to \$4 million by 2011 from the \$15 million allotted to its newly launched [Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program](#) that funds initiatives on security in the Americas. These monies will support Mexico's judiciary reform, including training and education for judges in the country's recently implemented adversarial court system.

To build the capacity of judges acting under this new system, Canada will also assist Mexico in adapting legal licensing and develop a code of conduct for lawyers at the national and state level. It will also harmonize criminal legislation and strengthen prosecution services. These efforts build upon projects to strengthen democratic institutions in Mexico undertaken by other countries, including the U.S.

In addition to discussions on co-operation to combat organized crime, there is an opening for Canada and Mexico to deepen military ties. The Mexican Armed Forces continue to be limited in their foreign operations but the debate about participation in peacekeeping operations has re-emerged. Emergency preparedness and disaster relief operations are more immediate prospects for their involvement. The participation of Mexican military personnel in courses at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre could be used as an opportunity to exchange information on this area and explore opportunities for further joint co-operation.

The Action Plan's renewed focus on economic prosperity is also refreshing given that in recent years, despite best intentions, this agenda seemed stalled. More attention to this file will hopefully foster co-operation in science, technology and innovation, and ensure better inclusion of small and medium enterprises into value chains and foreign trade structure. It will also provide a better framework for those industries that see strategic value in establishing regional production strategies.

Auto parts maker Linamar's \$120 million investment pledge and Bombardier's interest in investing up to \$400 million in the next three years are illustrations of the perceived potential of regional value chains in the automobile, aerospace, and railways industries. These discussions would also be a good opportunity to assess labour complementarities and to reflect on the future of North America. More opportunities could arise as Mexico engages in the expansion of its national infrastructure.

But where is the level of the debate on Mexico here in Canada? Until recently the relationship with Mexico was put into question in foreign policy circles, flagging it as an expensive distraction to the relationship with the U.S. and blaming this country for enhanced security measures at the Canada-U.S. border. To counteract these arguments and develop new ideas to strengthen the bilateral relationship, a group of experts and

practitioners formed the [Canada-Mexico Initiative](#) led by the Honourable Bill Graham and Senator Rosario Green. More voices have emerged in the debate recently.

No doubt, the negative impact of Canada's year-old decision to impose visa requirements to Mexicans begged for a more informed debate about the relationship with Mexico and brought to the surface different perspectives about the place this relationship should occupy in North America and other world settings.

Within the last year, the report [Open Canada: A Global Positioning Strategy for a Networked Age](#) has presented the most comprehensive view on why Mexico matters to Canada and pointed to specific areas to strengthen the bilateral relationship: sustained Canadian assistance to professionalize Mexican law enforcement forces and to strengthen the judiciary; reinforcing the government's capacity to collect taxes; enhancing military co-operation; implementing more streamlined visa procedures; and providing assistance to cope with poverty and inequality. It also calls for Mexico to take on a larger role in securing global peace.

The proposals to engage Mexico in North America and the manner in which the bilateral and trilateral relations could be articulated with Americas-wide proposals are less detailed. It is not clear whether there is room for bilateral co-operation in the policy to deepen ties Asia.

Nevertheless, the document needs be commended for bringing Mexico to the front burner into the public debate and attempting to shift the perception of this country in Canada. The promise is a prosperous market of 111 million consumers; the danger is a failing democracy at the U.S. border.