

North America Next

A Report to President Obama on Building Sustainable Security and Competitiveness

The Challenges are the Opportunities

A number of significant economic challenges for the United States have created unprecedented North American opportunities for enhancing our nation's—and our neighbors'—competitiveness, security and sustainability.

History has shown us that expanding our engagement with Canada and Mexico helps expand the U.S. economy. Almost 40 million jobs were created in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico between 1993 and 2007, and today, Canada and Mexico are the first- and third-ranked foreign suppliers of petroleum to the United States and our first- and third-most significant trading partners, respectively.

However, challenges remain, particularly at our extremely congested borders. This congestion, which is partly a consequence of a desire to thwart another major terrorist attack on the United States, has left us in many ways poorer, less secure and with major environmental challenges at our borders. Yet smart infrastructure investments at our borders can simultaneously enhance U.S. and North American security, competitiveness and sustainability by creating jobs, enhancing outdated infrastructure, and facilitating faster and “greener” trade.

The North American Center for Transborder Studies—in a year-long effort with input from numerous key partners throughout North America—has developed a set of recommendations for the Obama Administration. The following eight top-level recommendations can be implemented in the near- and medium-term and will also encourage greater collaboration in a number of other areas.

Key Recommendations

1. Build upon and expand the Mérida Initiative in a way that maximizes bipartisan U.S. support and multi-partisan Mexican consensus and buy-in.

Mexico currently faces its most significant security challenges in decades. These *shared* challenges threaten to complicate efforts to build a new, more secure future for U.S.-Mexico border communities and North America more generally. The United States needs to expand its strategic and financial investment in the Mérida Initiative. Build on the foundation of current binational cooperation on security by implementing the recommendations of the 2008 Joint Declaration of the Border Governors' Conference on border security, particularly regarding improved cooperation on tracking the crossborder movement of firearms and enhancing binational exchange of information on criminal activity on both sides of the border.

2. Energize and expand the North American Trilateral Leaders' Summit.

The Summit is the highest profile example of North American cooperation and should continue with greatly increased participation from a number of key stakeholders. Draw on the work of existing regional entities—governors, legislators, NGOs, academics, advocacy groups—for solutions to needs throughout North America. These include the private sector and public-private partnerships that would perhaps interact at pre-Summit meetings of NGOs, trade unions, academics, and think-tanks. Involving the three federal legislatures as well as state, county, tribal, and municipal governments within the Summit structure will deepen and strengthen collaboration among the United States, Mexico and Canada. Academic and public policy organizations could function at the center of a reinvigorated crossborder network.

- 3. Designate a North America/Borders authority to coordinate sustainable security.**
A senior deputy at the National Security Council should be appointed to deal with and to resolve the competing, complementary, and overlapping border management, national security, law enforcement, commerce, transportation, environment, water, regional development, and other infrastructure and political issues that comprise today's border area realities. A singular focus on traditional security does not address all of the critical functions of our borders.
- 4. Expand joint risk assessment and preparedness with Canada and Mexico.**
Much of the security effort in North America is focused on the prevention of another major terrorist attack. But this effort can be bolstered by more effectively engaging our North American neighbors as collaborators through enhanced joint defense of North America to minimize, mitigate, and manage natural and human-caused catastrophes in North America.
- 5. Create an effective North American trade and transportation plan with Canada and Mexico.**
Common transportation infrastructure challenges in all three countries—congestion, bottlenecks, infrastructure deficits—are an opportunity for concerted investment that will bring concrete, highly visible improvements to the trinational public. Build upon examples such as the existing Arizona-Sonora infrastructure plan and California's unique new port of entry at Otay Mesa. Economic stimulus packages going forward should include funds for bolstering border-region infrastructure.
- 6. Create a joint, revolving fund for infrastructure investments in North America.**
Infrastructure in the United States, Canada and Mexico is rapidly deteriorating and in urgent need of broad and deep investment. By pooling resources, the three countries can maximize the competitive benefit vis-à-vis Asia and Europe and jump-start our collective economic engine.
- 7. Implement a North American Greenhouse Gas Exchange Strategy.**
A North American Greenhouse Gas Exchange Strategy (NAGES, modeled on the Clean Development Mechanism to create a North American clean energy fund) could ensure the United States continues to have priority access to Canada's wealth of hydro-electricity, natural gas, light petroleum and uranium in exchange for offsets for the greenhouse gases created by their development. Mexico, as the seller of the offsets, could then develop the infrastructure to clean its energy, transportation, housing, and industrial sectors. This arrangement would improve U.S. energy interdependence and continental climate security.
- 8. Establish joint and practical assessments of North American policy effectiveness.**
We are in great need of practical and meaningful ways to guide and track progress on a number of key North American issues. Such an effort should include tools such as a Cross-Border Collaboration Scorecard and an annual State of North America Report (SoNAR) to be developed by North American academic and public policy organizations. The scorecard and report would inform the annual Trilateral Leaders' Summit.

Partnering on a Road Map for the Future

The Obama Administration has a unique opportunity to focus not only on trinational challenges in continental relations but also internal challenges with a public that is highly skeptical about competitiveness and security issues. In the current media environment, clearly the more daunting task is establishing a frank and productive conversation with relevant public and private institutions and the U.S. public on complex issues of regional competitiveness and security. North America's universities are particularly well-positioned and have an obligation to address these issues with their specialized expertise; a long-term perspective; increasingly more holistic and sophisticated approaches to solving complex problems; and a long history of productive cross-border collaboration.

The North American Center for Transborder Studies urges the new Administration to adopt these recommendations at this critical though opportune moment for the nation.

