

Beyond NAFTA: Shaping the Future of North American Integration within the Global Economy

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In a move that signaled the importance placed on the NAFTA partnership, Mexico's new president visited the U.S. and Canada before his inauguration. This was seen as a step forward in further strengthening political, economic, energy and security ties between all three countries. Other recent high-level meetings and policy papers are also shaping the future of North American integration.

Before his recent trip to the U.S., Mexico's new President Enrique Pena Nieto emphasized in a [Washington Post](#) editorial the opportunity both countries have to build on their economic partnership. He explained that, "in NAFTA we have a solid foundation to further integrate our economies through greater investments in finance, infrastructure, manufacturing and energy." As part of his government's strategy to reduce violence, he stated that it is, "important that our countries increase intelligence-sharing and crime-fighting techniques and promote cooperation among law enforcement agencies." In a White House [press release](#), Pena Nieto invited President Barack Obama to participate in the next North American Leaders Summit which will take place in Mexico sometime in 2013. With regards to U.S.-Mexico relations, Obama said that he was also looking forward to finding ways, "to strengthen our economic ties, our trade ties, our coordination along the border, improving our joint competitiveness, as well as common security issues."

According to the new policy brief, [A New Agenda with Mexico](#) put out by the Woodrow Wilson Center, "declines in illegal immigration and organized crime violence in Mexico, open up an opportunity for U.S. policymakers to deepen the economic relationship." The report recommended working, "together with Mexico and Canada to strengthen regional competitiveness and to grow North American exports to the world." It further elaborated on how, "Economic issues can drive the next phase in deepening U.S.-Mexico cooperation. Investments in trusted shipper programs, pre-inspection programs, and enhanced border infrastructure will be crucial." The study called on Washington to offer more, "support for Mexico's criminal justice institutions, and strengthen U.S. anti-money laundering efforts in order to combat organized crime and violence." It also recommended engaging, "Mexico more actively on hemispheric and extra-hemispheric foreign policy issues, ranging from terrorism to international trade and finance, as Mexico's role as a global power grows."

In a recent article, [Laura Carlsen](#), director of the Americas Policy Program scrutinized some the new Mexican president's policy initiatives. In the area of security, she pointed out that, "A real change in paradigm would require two measures that the Pena government has said it will not take: withdrawing the armed forces from counternarcotics efforts and renegotiating security cooperation with the U.S. government." She noted, "Pena Nieto has reassured the U.S. that his administration will continue the drug war." Carlsen

acknowledged how, “The U.S. government has actively promoted and supported the drug war model of enforcement and interdiction through the [Merida Initiative](#) and spearheaded the massive expansion of U.S. counternarcotics activities in the country.” She further added, “U.S. defense, intelligence and security companies depend on the Mexican drug war to obtain multi-million dollar government contracts. The Pentagon and other U.S. agencies have achieved unprecedented freedom to act and even direct actions on Mexican soil.” As far as economic policy goes, Carlsen was also critical of President Pena Nieto’s commitment to deepen rather than fix NAFTA.

Just days before being sworn in as Mexico’s new president, Pena Nieto also visited Canada. In a [press statement](#), Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he was looking forward to working with him in improving trade ties, as well as strengthening North American competitiveness and security. In an editorial that appeared in the [Globe and Mail](#), Pena Nieto announced that, “One of the areas with the largest potential for co-operation between Mexico and Canada is energy production and development. Mexico’s energy sector is about to change. I want to enhance its potential by opening it up to national and foreign private investment.” He went on to say, “We can cultivate a closer relationship in this area in order to attain North American energy security.” Canada-U.S. energy issues are also at the forefront. Following his re-election, President Obama is under pressure to [make a decision on the Keystone XL pipeline](#). The proposed project would carry oil from western Canada to the Texas gulf coast.

In the report, [Forging a New Strategic Partnership between Canada and Mexico](#), Perrin Beatty and Andres Rozental recognized the opportunity both countries have to reshape bilateral relations. Among other things, the policy paper recommended removing the visa requirement for Mexican visitors to Canada. It supported increasing funding to the [Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program](#) which is aimed at enhancing the ability, “of government agencies, international organizations and non-governmental entities to prevent and respond to threats posed by transnational criminal activity throughout the Americas.” In addition, the study called for institutionalizing the North American Leaders Summit and establishing a complementary North American Business Council. It also advocated pursuing further economic cooperation with the U.S. on a pragmatic basis and suggested that, “Ongoing border and regulatory initiatives should be results-oriented and pursued in the most effective way possible, bilateral or trilateral, as the case may be. This policy recommendation can be extended to any North American issue, including continental security perimeter initiatives and anti-narcotics efforts.”

Last month’s [NAFTA20 North America Summit](#) examined NAFTA’s evolution, as well as its future prospects. Speaking at the conference, [Thomas Donohue](#) President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce urged Canadian, Mexican and U.S. leaders to move forward with, “the integration of our markets to further rationalize our supply chains, increase efficiency, and better position North America in the global economy.” He went on to say, “We need to advance regulatory cooperation, streamline our border, and reform immigration practices to ensure the free flow of products, people, capital, and ideas.” Donohue concluded that [Canada](#) and [Mexico](#) joining the U.S. and other countries as part of the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) (TPP) trade agreement would help maximize the strength of the North American market. Meanwhile, there are growing concerns over the secrecy surrounding the TPP. This includes fears that it would grant corporations more power and further put the sovereignty of member nations at risk. It could also be used as a [backdoor renegotiation of NAFTA](#) without officially having to open it back up. With the [15th round of](#)

[talks](#) coming to a close in New Zealand, a final TPP deal could be reached before the end of 2013.

In October, Ottawa hosted the [North American Forum](#). The annual get-together includes, "Canadian, Mexican and American thought leaders, whose purpose is to advance a shared vision of North America, and to contribute to improved relations among the three neighbors." Much like other secretive gatherings, [reporters were barred](#) from entering the Forum's events. This year's discussions centered around energy and North American economic competitiveness. Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay also delivered a [keynote address](#) which focused on continental security issues. He highlighted the bilateral defence relations that the U.S. and Canada enjoy through NORAD. MacKay remarked on how, "Canada and Mexico are also becoming important strategic partners and stronger defence ties with Mexico are a priority." He praised the first meeting of [North American Defence Ministers](#) as a, "great opportunity for our three nations to identify ways to work together to address shared defence and security challenges." The trilateral defence meeting which took place in March is part of the process of integrating Mexico into NORAD and establishing a North American security perimeter.

While NAFTA partners pursue a trilateral approach with respect to different initiatives, the U.S. also has a separate bilateral border and regulatory agenda with Canada and Mexico. This is part of ongoing efforts to create a common economic and security perimeter. As the incremental path towards a North American Union continues, citizens from the U.S., Canada and Mexico are not being consulted, much less being given a choice in the matter even though the plan threatens the future sovereignty of each country.

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