

Snubbing Mexico: how Canada's conservatives contributed to undermine trilateralism in North America

Julián Castro-Rea

Julián Castro-Rea : Associate Professor, University of Alberta

DOI: [10.25518/1374-3864.1645](https://doi.org/10.25518/1374-3864.1645)

Résumé :

L'intégration nord-américaine, débutant avec l'Accord de libre-échange nord-américain (ALÉNA, 1994), était supposément une affaire trilatérale ; liant le Canada, le Mexique et les États-Unis dans une relation horizontale, pour la poursuite commune d'une meilleure compétitivité internationale. Pourtant, vingt ans plus tard l'Amérique du nord se retrouve prisonnière du modèle habituel: deux relations bilatérales avec les États-Unis au centre, un contenu trilatéral limité, et par conséquent des relations limitées entre le Mexique et le Canada.

Cet article vise à établir jusqu'à quel point les gouvernements conservateurs récents au Canada ont contribué à miner l'esprit trilatéral de l'ALÉNA ; en avançant l'hypothèse suivante : Les gouvernements conservateurs canadiens ont intentionnellement marginalisé le Mexique du processus de prise des décisions ayant des impacts sur l'Amérique du nord. Cette action était fondée sur la perception que le Mexique est un obstacle pour atteindre les buts principaux du programme conservateur en matière de politique extérieure (programme que Lagassé, Massie et Roussel appellent « neocontinentalisme »¹).

Abstract :

North American integration, launched with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994), was supposed to be a trilateral affair; linking Canada, Mexico and the United States into a horizontal relationship aimed at improving joint global competitiveness. Twenty years later, however, North America is caught into a "business as usual" mode: two bilateral relations with the United States at their centre, limited trilateral contents and mostly rhetorical relations between Mexico and Canada.

This article aims at determining to what extent Canada's recent Conservative governments have undermined NAFTA's trilateral spirit. The hypothesis to be tested is the following: The successive Harper governments have purposely marginalized Mexico from the decision-making process in North America. This is because they see Mexico as an encumbrance for the realization of major interconnected goals of the Conservative foreign policy agenda (an agenda that Lagassé, Massie and Roussel call neocontinentalism²).

Introduction: The Extent of the Problem

While regionalism in the Americas has existed for two centuries, the three countries of North America entered the era of so-called "open regionalism" with the enthusiastic adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994³. This initiative was groundbreaking in several respects. For the first time in a trade agreement, it incorporated issues like investment,

trade in services, and intellectual property; opening the gate for the inclusion of such themes in future multilateral negotiations. More importantly perhaps, it joined under a single agreement countries of very different size, economic and political power and level of development. Indeed, with NAFTA Canada and Mexico agreed to gradually open their economies to competition from the largest and most powerful economy in the world, the United States; which in turn in principle gave its immediate neighbors access to its enormous market. Through the following decades, this model would be emulated by other countries in the Americas with varying degrees of success; and was behind the failed attempt to establish a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), originally expected to be launched by 2005.

NAFTA is also a prominent example of the kind of regionalism that the United States has promoted in the Americas since the end of the 19th century, with the creation of the Pan American Union⁴. Regional agreements where the US participates take implicitly for granted that this country will assume a leadership role; and that member countries will contribute to the achievement of goals that were defined first and foremost in the United States. Earlier examples of this kind of regionalism are, besides the Pan American Union, the Organization of American States, and the Inter-American Development Bank. Free trade becomes, in this context, a tool to affirm US hegemony in the Americas⁵. This model of regionalism in the Americas has been competing with agreements that restrict membership to Latin American or Caribbean countries, in an attempt to build alternatives to US hegemony and even confront it. Examples of this second model include the Latin American Integration Association, region-specific agreements such as the Andean Pact, Mercosur and CARICOM; and more recently UNASUR, ALBA and CELAC⁶.

Because of their relative weakness in the NAFTA deal, Canada and Mexico were expected to become "natural allies" or strategic partners in North America. The basic thrust of the natural allies' thesis is that both Canada and Mexico are middle-sized powers, members of the global system's semi-periphery, with important yet limited influence on global affairs. In order to maximize their global standing, both countries have historically bet on the rule of international law and multilateral organizations; where they can "punch above their weight" by leading smaller countries within their respective areas of influence, protected by norms that put them on a global moral high ground⁷.

Canada and Mexico have something else in common: a neighbor which happens to be the most powerful country in the world and is also, understandably, their top priority in foreign policy matters. Thus, the natural allies thesis goes, both countries have a clear interest in teaming up to face their common priority, protecting themselves in the process of the enormous influence that the United States exerts over them. It was thus expected that increased economic interaction promoted by NAFTA, to the extent that it would increase the areas of interdependence and common interest between Mexico and Canada, will create the conditions for the natural alliance to thrive.

Indeed, Canada and Mexico have grown closer relations over the past twenty years. Their mutual economic importance, measured either in terms of trade or investment, has grown exponentially. In 2012, Mexico was Canada's fifth largest export destination, and Canada's third-largest source of imports. In 2013, two-way trade between the two countries amounted to \$30 billion USD. The stock of two-way investment was close to \$5 billion USD in 2010⁸. The areas in which these countries cooperate keep expanding, notably Mexican temporary workers in Canadian farms and other service-related industries, Canadian tourism flooding Mexican resorts, energy exports and technology transfers, student and faculty university exchanges, etc.

Yet, on the government-to-government front, despite much diplomatic talk and continued bilateral meetings, there has been limited substantial growth on political cooperation; indeed, the current state of governmental coordination is a far cry from the natural alliance expectations⁹. Time and again, the record has shown that the “natural allies” thesis works mostly in theory, but to a very limited extent in practice. The critical observer can count with the fingers of one hand the instances in which co-operation between Ottawa and Mexico City has been firm, sustained, and has borne some concrete fruit; especially in regards to relations with the United States¹⁰. In contrast, the catalog of “missed opportunities” is much longer, rife with decisions or actions where short term calculations got in the way of meaningful coordination.

What happened? Why are the Canadian and Mexican governments not looking eye to eye with each other despite the apparently clear advantages to do so? More importantly for the purposes of this special issue, was NAFTA's daring experiment of a new kind of open regionalism a failure? While many factors may contribute to the full explanation of this paradox, several of which are related to the actions carried out by the US and Mexican governments, this paper will focus on and discuss the share of responsibility borne by Canada's recent Conservative governments.

9/11, North America Changes Approach

September 11, 2001 turned out to be a watershed event for North America in many respects¹¹. A recent book dealing with the impacts over North American of the events of that single day bears the appropriate title “Game Changer”¹². Indeed, those events would also have major consequences for the process that is the main focus of this paper.

The main impact of the events was that national security, a policy goal completely ignored during NAFTA's negotiations¹³, became a central priority of the continental alliance. More specifically, US national security was challenged by the attacks, so that country placed collaboration on this matter as the top priority for future North American cooperation.

Not surprisingly, Canada and Mexico followed suit. Because of the strong dependence of Mexican and Canadian economies from the one of their common neighbor, Ottawa and Mexico City reacted on panic mode to this change of priorities. The Canadian government was concerned in particular with the possible adoption of stiff border management approaches similar to the ones the United States applies to its border with Mexico. Ottawa, then, insisted on a specific deal to enhance security measures at its border, during bilateral negotiations with the United States separately from Mexico. This Canadian approach started to do away with NAFTA's trilateral spirit and showed to the world the fragility of the political dimensions of North America's integration process.

The events of 9/11 also brought back to life the important policy differences that Canada and Mexico had followed in the past as a guide for their military relations with the United States. In the aftermath of World War II and in the wake of the Cold War, Canada had been a cautious yet unambiguous ally to the US' contention efforts. Cooperation for the creation of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) system and the establishment of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), as early as 1957, immediately come to mind. In contrast, through this period the Mexican military was reluctant to openly cooperate with its Northern counterpart, as a result of a legacy of hostility and distrust motivated by two US military interventions in Mexico (1847-48 and 1914). Therefore, US appeals for cooperation on security matters fell in very different ears on the opposite side of the country's borders.

Of course, the Canadian change of approach was operated under the leadership of Liberal Prime Ministers—Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin—then at the helm of the Canadian government. However, the Liberal governments still tried to salvage trilateralism in North America, with the adoption of the Security and Prosperity Partnership agreement (SPP) in March 2005. Moreover, the Martin government promoted the Canada-Mexico Partnership agreement, announced in October 2004; comprising five areas of cooperation (urban housing, sustainable cities, human capital, competitiveness, and agribusiness). More importantly perhaps, Chrétien and Martin also mildly played the “natural allies” card in 2003, when they teamed up with Mexico City to confront Washington on its Iraq policy¹⁴. Mexico and Canada also worked together trying to clarify NAFTA's dispute settlement issues regarding Canadian softwood lumber exports to the United States, and border management differences¹⁵

In contrast, when the Conservatives came to power in February 2006, they immediately privileged and enhanced the divisive approach to North American relations, because it meshed quite well with their redefined foreign priorities. In fact, the divisive approach would become the basis for a lasting, more radical overhaul of Canada's foreign relations. As Justin Massie explains: “Since the attacks of 9/11, continentalism has become an increasingly dominant discourse in Canadian foreign policy”¹⁶. This is explained in more detail in the section that follows.

Harper: Doing Away with the Liberal Heritage

One of the central tasks that Stephen Harper aimed to accomplish from the moment he first succeeded to form a government in 2006 was to wane Canada from its Liberal heritage¹⁷. This heritage of course includes the brand of foreign policy that successive Liberal governments crafted during the post-Second World War era. This brand is usually called “the Pearsonian approach”, precisely because Lester B. Pearson, future Canadian Prime minister in charge of the foreign affairs portfolio from 1948 to 1958, defined its basic tenets.

The Pearsonian approach, carried on consistently and enhanced by successive Liberal governments, and even followed by three consecutive Progressive Conservative governments (1984-1993), has the following essential components¹⁸:

- internationalism, or a belief in Canada's responsibilities with the global community, in a balanced blend of idealism and pragmatism,
- commitment with multilateral organizations for the satisfaction of foreign policy objectives; in particular, for the achievement of the following goals: peacekeeping, arms control and disarmament, respect of human rights, protection of the environment and development assistance,
- continuity from international to domestic values, to the point where Canada's international activities provide the country with a source of identity that most citizens are expected to share.

The climax of this approach was reached during Lloyd Axworthy's tenure as foreign minister (January 1996-October 2000), under whose direction Canada's international approach was openly based on ethics-based public diplomacy, soft power and human security principles.

In contrast, the Conservative foreign policy agenda put in motion since 2006 (dubbed neocontinentalism by Lagassé, Massie and Roussel¹⁹), aimed at redefining Canada's place in the

world along the following lines:

- building a special relationship with the United States, based on defense and border management cooperation,
- redefining Canada as a military power, both today and historically, willing to contribute to international coalitions aimed at asserting the perceived US' "benevolent hegemony" worldwide,
- repositioning Canada geopolitically as a Western country, by engaging into selective multilateralism with partners in the Global North (NATO, G8, the English-speaking world, etc.), and symbolically reviving Canada' imperial connection and British identity,
- putting business opportunities at the centre of international interactions, thus downplaying government-to-government global aid to development.

The Conservative governments have thus decidedly adopted a "bandwagoning" approach to relations with the United States; as they see Canada's prospects, mostly economic but also to some extent political, tied to their country's southern neighbor. In their view, the United States is not a threat or a challenge but an opportunity to Canada, because most Canadian foreign business is made with that country and also because the hegemon offers a liberal and ultimately benevolent alternative to rising world powers such as China and Russia. By firmly supporting the United States, the Conservatives believe, Canada stands to gain increased influence in the world and especially over US foreign and defense policies²⁰. This is the essence of neocontinentalism, where an opportunistic—and arguably naïve—vision regarding the United States is blended with an obsession for hard power and an elitist approach to intergovernmental relations, while business transactions are placed at the centre of most international initiatives.

The Harper governments indeed sought to transform Canada into a "virtuous warrior", fighting against terrorism and dictators around the world. Simon Dalby, rather than dismissing this shift as nonsense as other observers have done, wants to understand the geopolitical premises underlying such policy change²¹. Under Harper, Dalby details, Canada wanted to reinvent itself as a "masculine warrior" as opposed to its traditional role of caring peacekeeper, a transformation evidenced by Harper's support to the Canadian combat mission in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and to the military operation against former Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi. He also points out to the renewed enthusiasm for the moniker "Royal" attached to Canadian institutions, and the association with the colonial past, as further symbols of a new version of imperial chauvinism that Harper's Canada was eager to participate in. In the process, the Conservatives wanted to eradicate Axworthy's "human security", soft power and public diplomacy agenda from Canada's international identity²².

An important component of repositioning Canada as part of the Western world was to portray this country as an indispensable component of the global region's success. For example, Canadian oil was portrayed as a country's contribution to the Western world, an "ethical alternative" to Middle Eastern energy imports and a key component of continental energy security. Hence the aggressiveness of the Canadian government in pushing Alberta's oil sands development, an effort that involved silencing critical scientists and sabotaging international efforts at addressing climate change—notably, withdrawing from the Kyoto protocol—, and the dismissal of environmental security agenda that did not fit the business-minded, narrow Conservative thinking²³.

Under the Conservatives, Canada's International Development Agency (CIDA) funds came to dry up. The federal government lost interest in Canadian involvement in overseas economic development of

poorer countries. Even if the Conservative governments publicly announced that the focus of their attention would shift to the Americas, this attention was mostly devoted to supporting Canadian business in the region; notably environmentally unfriendly and socially predatory mining companies that are making a killing (in more than one sense) in that part of the world²⁴

It is clear from this enumeration that there is not much room left to Mexico as a strategic partner in global politics among the Conservatives' foreign priorities; only perhaps in the economic opportunities dossier. Even worse, Mexico carries the potential of becoming a complicating factor, even a hurdle, in Ottawa's dealings with Washington; to the extent that in North American trilateral fora Mexico may turn the US attention away from top Canadian priorities.

As Stephen Clarkson explains, under the Conservative governments "...Canada has played a leading role in breaking down whatever trilateral solidarity NAFTA had originally generated"²⁵. The Canadian government purposely distanced itself from its Mexican counterpart, fearful of a diminished influence in Washington, all the while resurrecting the "special relationship" themes of the old-fashioned, post-World War II relations with Washington. Revealingly, Ottawa failed to organize the 2010 trilateral North American leaders summit, which had been promised a year before; and did so again in February 2015, canceling without much explanation two trilateral summit that it had offered to host. Instead, Ottawa negotiated with the United States the so-called "Beyond the Border Action Plan". Made public in December 2011, exactly ten years after the first bilateral border cooperation agreement was reached in the aftermath of 9/11, the new Action Plan aims at reaffirming and deepening Canada's commitment with bandwagoning policies.

Therefore, the Harper government has developed a cynical approach in regards to Mexico: much diplomatic lip service around the themes of friendship, partnership, commonalities and opportunities, based on the "natural allies" discourse created twenty years ago; followed by little substance in terms of concrete action, and sabotage to bilateral commitments for joint initiatives. In other words, a combination of a charm offensive with an effective defensive snubbing.

Snubbing Mexico (and Mexicans)

Perhaps the single action that best represents Canada's changing mood in regards to Mexico is the imposition of visas to all Mexican visitors, starting July 2009²⁶.

For many years, Ottawa and Mexico City had a mutual visa exception regime in place. This exception regime, created many years before NAFTA was even a plan, came to symbolize the spirit of equality, mutual trust, even-handedness and co-operation that free trade was expected to foster. It was often showcased as an example of the different way in which Canada treated Mexico, in contrast with the United States, a country that has always maintained visa restrictions for Mexicans wishing to visit the country.

This crucial symbolic dimension did not matter to the Harper government when it decided to impose visa requirements to ALL Mexican visitors without distinction—including business executives, students, people having family members in Canada, etc.—with the argument that the government wanted to deter bogus refugee claimants from arriving to Canada. This measure was thus seen in Mexico as tantamount to "killing mosquitoes with a cannon", a blunt policy instrument doing more damage than actually solving an existing problem.

The number of Mexican refugee claimants in Canada had indeed quickly increased in the years prior to the imposition of the visa requirement: from 1,100 in 1999 to over 9,500 in 2008²⁷. The increase was largely due to the dramatic deterioration of the state of human rights in Mexico, as a result of the war against drug trafficking gangs that the Mexican government had launched in December 2006. However, the Harper government refused to acknowledge that a humanitarian crisis was indeed looming in Mexico, rejecting the vast majority of refugee applications and ultimately imposing overnight the visa requirement; with no previous warning or negotiation whatsoever with the Mexican government.

This decision can be analyzed from several interrelated angles. Domestic motivations may have played a role in it. At the time when visas were imposed Canada was going through an economic crisis, triggered the previous fall by the sub-prime mortgage meltdown in the United States and the shock waves it sent over North America's economy. In a context of shrinking employment opportunities, imposing visas to Mexicans may be seen as an attempt to limit the supply of foreign labor that would compete with Canadians for the limited positions available. Visas may also be intended to limit the influx of migrants coming from regions other than Europe, to assuage the concerns of some Canadians about the growing presence of people from diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds²⁸.

For the purposes of this article, however, it matters to discuss three policy motivations specifically targeting Mexico. These motivations, we believe, played a determinant role in precipitating the unilateral decision of visa imposition.

First, the refusal of the Conservative governments to admit that a serious crisis was indeed taking place in Mexico was politically motivated. Because the Canadian government's official position portrayed Mexico as a close friend and economic partner, Ottawa insisted until the end of the Conservative governments in considering Mexico as a safe country, where no human rights abuses were committed²⁹. When announcing the measure, Jason Kenney, then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, declared that the visa requirement was intended to focus his Department's attention to "help people who really need Canada's protection"³⁰. This position, of course, flied in the face of media reports available even in Canada that confirmed the growing humanitarian crisis developing in Mexico, a situation also reiterated by Amnesty International Canada³¹. By 2009, the estimate of casualties due to the war on drugs in Mexico was close to 17 thousand victims. Since 2006 until December 2013, the "war on drugs" had produced the alarming balance of at least 80 thousand violent deaths plus an estimated 30 thousand people "disappearances"³².

Ottawa's willful state of denial about the humanitarian crisis developing in Mexico is indicative of the departure from international ideals operated under the Harper governments. In the eyes of these governments, Mexico was an economic partner and a neighbor in North America, period. Ottawa was reluctant to make North American relations more complex by adding a humanitarian dimension to it; something that its Liberal predecessors never hesitated to do, especially under Axworthy's period as foreign minister.

Secondly, the visa requirement is a politically expedient alternative to admitting that the Canadian refugee adjudication system urgently needs an overhaul. Indeed, the backlog of refugee claims adjudication was not provoked by the increasing number of Mexican claimants, but by a badly designed and slow processing system. The surge of Mexican (and Czech) claimants was simply used as a convenient excuse to explain the crisis of the system, as the surge was supposedly jamming

the process. In fact, claimants became scapegoats for a problem that the Canadian government was unable or unwilling to solve³³. This problem is all the more pressing as the US government is concerned by Canada's refugee policy, seen as too liberal and potentially letting potential terrorists enter Canadian territory. This is an important issue even from the neoconservative perspective of the Conservative government, to the extent that it wanted to reassure Washington that it was doing everything it could to make North America more secure, following post-9/11 standards established by the US government.

Thirdly, and as a corollary to the previous two angles, Mexican refugee claimants were stigmatized and criminalized because they were allegedly coming from a "safe country". From then on, Mexican visitors are systematically suspect of harboring ill intentions and potentially breaking the law; unless they are able to prove otherwise. They are thus burdened with an excessively onerous paperwork to demonstrate that they are indeed legitimate visitors. In order to get a Canadian visa, Mexican nationals are required from then on to visit in person one of only three Canadian consular offices serving in Mexico's vast territory. They need to produce a passport, a letter from their employer written in English or French granting a leave of absence for the duration of their planned trip, salary slips, original bank documents demonstrating solvency covering the previous six months, evidence of assets in Mexico and a letter of invitation of someone residing in Canada. Indeed, from then on it became more difficult to the average Mexican to obtain a Canadian visa than a visa to the United States!³⁴.

Conclusions: Is There a Future for Mexico in North America?

Given the trends described and discussed above, NAFTA's image as a role model for other integration schemes is in doubt. Equally, the prospects for a trilateral North America to affirm its identity as a global region are uncertain. As a whole, North America has failed to develop a true partnership that is unequivocally acknowledged and respected through the world. In the process, both Mexico and Canada have lost terrain in their former independent global standing, as they are now seen by many external observers, even in former areas of influence like Latin America and Africa respectively, as basically relays of US power.

Equally importantly, the political distance separating Mexico from Canada has grown. According to Massie, Canada's heavy bandwagoning with the United States was likely to increase over time under Conservative governments, even replacing Canada's traditional security policy pillar: Atlantic alliances assorted with critical cooperation with the United States³⁵.

The events of 9/11 "...certainly changed North America. Part of this change was the ultimate alienation of Canada and Mexico from each other"³⁶. The visa for Mexicans issue, of course, goes a long way in this respect. As Kim Nossal explains:

[T]he visa decision [...] shows how little interest the Canadian government has in developing a relationship with Mexico that goes beyond the dual bi-lateralism that has marked the North American project since NAFTA came into being³⁷.

Until November 2015, the visa requirement for Mexican visitors had not been dropped, despite repeated requests from Mexico City; all the while Ottawa no longer required Czech visitors to obtain a visa, under pressure from the European Union, and even granted a visa exemption to visitors from Chile one year earlier³⁸. Once again, economic and political imperatives dictated Ottawa's

decisions. Clearly, both NAFTA's trilateral partnership or the "natural allies" thesis carried limited weight, showing the weakness of multilateralism in North America, which can be undermined by a unilateral decision coming from any of the member countries.

Indeed, referring mostly to the security aspect of foreign relations, David Haglund argues that Canada and the US are the real "natural allies", whereas Mexico has very limited ties to Canada and has been backing away from alliance with the US as well; an interpretation that according to Haglund is evidenced by Mexico's withdrawal from the inter-American defence Rio Pact³⁹. However, he suggests that since the changing security environment in the post 9/11 era has put anti-terrorism at the top of each country's agenda, there is room for Mexico in the Canada-US alliance; to the extent that Washington is concerned with potential narco-terrorism being exported from Mexico. Haglund, a specialist on transatlantic security, thus thinks that there is room for Mexico in the US-Canada alliance as long as Mexico City decided to join NATO. However, while this author is right in pointing out that NATO membership would give Mexico an enhanced North American identity, it is far from certain that this country would be automatically admitted. Moreover, he is implicitly suggesting that Mexico has to embrace Canadian and US security priorities and strategies as a condition for membership in North America. However, shouldn't Mexican objectives also be understood and considered if the objective is to build a true North American partnership? Is the quiet acceptance of its neighbours' previous agreements and predominant position the only way in which Mexico can return to the North American fold? In other words, is bandwagoning, the way Canada has recently done, the only alternative left to Mexico to preserve a trilateral North America? More importantly, is traditional military security the only way to bring North America together? What remains clear from the analysis offered in this article is that, as long as the Conservatives were in control of the federal government in Canada, the chances that Mexico had of becoming an equal partner in North America were truly slim.

The Liberal Relay

However, the political environment is quickly changing. On November 4, 2015 the Liberal Party took over the reins of Canada's federal government; after having won a decisive majority of seats in the House of Commons-184 over 338 seats-in the October 19 elections. Canada's new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had promised during the campaign that if elected he would work to lift the Mexican visa requirement and would host a trilateral summit with Mexico and the US, in an effort to repair North American relations⁴⁰ "Mexico is now an equal or greater strategic preoccupation in Washington than Canada. That basic fact cannot be wished away... Harper's approach to relations with Mexico has been belligerent and borderline churlish" Trudeau added. He finally offered to work toward the coordination of environmental and climate change policies between the three North American countries⁴¹. Later on, Mexico was one of the few countries that were singled out in the Liberal electoral platform, where the party pledged to "renew and repair our relationships with our North American partners", by lifting the visa requirement and hosting the promised trilateral summit⁴².

The Mexican government expected no less. Mexico's ambassador to Canada expressed his hopes that under Trudeau "the international policy of Canada will change to being less militaristic and more multilateralist"⁴³. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto was the first country leader who contacted Mr. Trudeau to congratulate him after his electoral victory was confirmed⁴⁴. This display of appreciation is in stark contrast with Peña Nieto's February 2014 cancellation of a scheduled

official visit to Canada, over displeasure with the visa issue.

Trudeau seems to be delivering on his campaign promises. Less than two weeks after his installation as Prime Minister he met with Peña Nieto at the G20 Summit in Turkey, in November 15, 2015, and again at the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Manila a few days later; both leaders then started coordinating their countries' multilateral positions. On June 28, 2016 Peña Nieto paid an official visit to Trudeau, where Canada's Prime Minister formally offered to drop the visa requirement for Mexican visitors to Canada on December 1, 2016; apparently in exchange for Mexico dropping the embargo of Canadian beef imports starting in October of this same year. Trudeau and Peña Nieto also offered to work together on other matters, including the environment, security, defence, high-level meetings led jointly by their foreign ministers, collaboration in the development of trucking corridors, and student exchange⁴⁵. The following day, Trudeau hosted the first North American Leaders' Summit since February 2014, thus honouring another campaign promise and the failed offers that former Prime Minister Harper had made of hosting the summit in 2010 and 2015⁴⁶

In sum, Canada's new Liberal government may roll back the Conservative legacy of snubbing Mexico. In the process, it may give a new chance to trilateralism in North America and to NAFTA as a model of regionalism. It is still too early to tell the net result of the Canadian government's actions, even if it is clear that these actions are steps in the right direction.

Notes

¹ LAGASSÉ (P.), MASSIE (J.) and ROUSSEL (S.), "Le néoconservatisme en politique étrangère et de défense canadiennes", in CASTRO-REA (J.) and BOILY (F.), *Le fédéralisme selon Harper. La place du Québec dans le Canada conservateur*, Ste.-Foy, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2014, p. 49-81

² *Ibid.*

³ KNIGHT (W.A.), CASTRO-REA (J.) and GHANY (H.), *Re-Mapping the Americas: Trends in Region-Making*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, p. 12-22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13-14

⁵ CASTRO-REA (J.), 'Free Trade: A Tool for US Hegemony in the Americas', in KNIGHT (W.A.), CASTRO-REA (J.) and GHANY (H.), *Op.cit.* p. 69-82

⁶ KNIGHT (W.A.), CASTRO-REA (J.) and GHANY (H.), *Op.cit.*, p. 112-25, 307-326.

⁷ A sizable amount of literature has been published on the subject for more than twenty years, starting in the early 1990s. An early example of this literature is CASTRO-REA (J.), 'Canadá, ¿aliado o adversario? Un punto de vista mexicano', *Revista mexicana de política exterior*, n°36, summer 1993, p. 42-62; followed by KLEPAK (H.), *Natural Allies? Canadian and Mexican Perspectives on International Security*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996 among many others. This main



theme was still replayed as late as 2012 in BUGAILISKIS (A.) and ROZENTAL (A.), *Canada among Nations 2011-2012. Canada and Mexico's Unfinished Agenda*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.

8 DAWSON (L.), 'Canada's trade with Mexico: Where we've been, where we're going and why it matters', Canadian Council of Chief Executives Report, February 2014.

9 NOSSAL (K.R.), 'Canadian Policy Towards Mexico: Pastor's Puzzle Reconsidered', *North American Dialogue Series*, no. 13, January-June 2010, p. 2.

10 Cooperation between Ottawa and Mexico City in 1996 to reject extra-territorial US legislation forbidding trade with Cuba; and the joint work involving the Canadian and Mexican representations to the UN to attempt to avert the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 come to mind.

11 See for instance CASTRO-REA (J.), "Assessing North American Politics after September 11. Security, Democracy, and Sovereignty", in AYRES (J.) and MACDONALD (L.), *Contentious Politics in North America: National Protest and Transnational Collaboration under Continental Integration*, London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 35-53..

12 PAQUIN (J.) and JAMES (P.), *Game Changer. The Impact of 9-11 on North American Security*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.

13 In this respect, the main thesis of James Thompson's recent book is hardly supported by evidence. He argues that NAFTA originally made use of trade strategy as a means to achieve security policy goals. In order to argue in favour of that thesis, the author is forced to understand national security in very broad terms, a notion that was clearly absent from the minds of the negotiators of the commercial agreement, only concerned with economic competitiveness. The goal of enhancing national security as defined in realist, military terms was simply not part of the original trilateral deliberations, as confirmed by the studies carried out by Maxwell Cameron, Brian Tomlin and Maryse Robert, among others. See THOMPSON (J.), *Making North America. Trade, Security and Integration*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014; CAMERON (M.) and TOMLIN (B.), *The Making of NAFTA. How the Deal was Done*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000; ROBERT (M.), *Negotiating NAFTA : Explaining the Outcome in Culture, Textiles, Autos, and Pharmaceuticals*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000.

14 CASTRO-REA (J.), 2009, *Op.cit.*, p. 51.

15 CLARKSON (S.), 'The Disintegrative Effects of North America's Securitization on the Canada-Mexico Relationship', in PAQUIN (J.) and JAMES (P.), *Game Changer. The Impact of 9-11 on North American Security*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014, p. 132-133.

16 MASSIE (J.), 'Toward Greater Opportunism. Balancing and Bandwagoning in Canada-US Relations', in PAQUIN (J.) and JAMES (P.), *Op.cit.*, p. 58.

17 MARTIN (L.), *Harperland: The Politics of Control*, Toronto, Viking, 2010.

18 MELAKOPIDES (C.), *Pragmatic Idealism. Canadian Foreign Policy, 1945-1995*, Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, p. 3-5.

19 LAGASSÉ (P.), MASSIE (J.) and ROUSSEL (S.), 'Le néoconservatisme en politique étrangère et de

défense canadiennes', in CASTRO-REA (J.) and BOILY (F.), *Le fédéralisme selon Harper. La place du Québec dans le Canada conservateur*, Sainte.-Foy, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2014, p. 49-81

²⁰ MASSIE, *Op.cit.*, p. 58-59.

²¹ DALBY (S.), 'Forward to The Past: Stephen Harper's Geopolitical Imagination', draft paper for the "Critical Reflections on the Study and Practice of Canadian Security" workshop, *Centre for International and Security Studies*, Toronto, York University, February 2012.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ GORDON (T.) and WEBBER (J. R.), 'Imperialism and Resistance: Canadian mining companies in Latin America', *Third World Quarterly*, volume 29, no. 1, 2008, p. 63-87.

²⁵ CLARKSON (S.), *Op.cit.*, p. 134.

²⁶ A similar requirement was also imposed on Czech visitors, arguing that Roma refugee claimants were abusing the refugee system. However, the requirement to Czech visitors was dropped some years later, while it remained in place for Mexican nationals. For further elaboration on the implications of this double standard see the conclusions of this paper below.

²⁷ NOSSAL(K.R.), *Op.cit.*, p. 11

²⁸ Comes to mind the controversial comment that Lucien Bouchard, then leader of the nationalist Bloc Québécois party, made on October 14, 1995, "We're one of the white races that has the fewest children", inviting Quebec families to overcome this situation.

²⁹ GILBERT (L.), 'Canada's Visa Requirement for Mexicans and Its Political Rationalities', *Norteamérica*, vol.8, n°1 January-June 2013, p. 141.

³⁰ CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, 'Ottawa Imposes a Visa on Mexico', press release, 13 July 2009. Emphasis added.

³¹ NEVE (A.), 'Rights at the Borders: Human Rights and Migration in the Canada Mexico Relationship', in DRACHE (D.), *Big Picture Realities. Canada and Mexico at the Crossroads*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008, p. 73-86.

³² SICILIA (J.), 'Guerra antidrogas: su otro rostro', *Proceso*, 9 December 2013. Available online <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=359986> (consulted 11 November 2015); ZUCKERMANN (L.), 'Once meses del sexenio de Peña: casi 11 mil ejecuciones', *Excélsior*, 25 November 2013. Available online <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/opinion/leo-zuckermann/2013/11/25/930406> (consulted 11 November 2015).

³³ GALLAGHER (S.), 'Canada's Broken Refugee Policy System', in MOENS (A.) and COLLACOT (M.), *Immigration Policy and the Terrorist Threat in Canada and the United States*, Vancouver, The Fraser Institute, 2008.

³⁴ GILBERT (L.), p. 140



35 MASSIE (J.), *Op.cit.*, p. 60.

36 CLARKSON (S.), *Op.cit.*, p. 136.

37 NOSSAL (K.R.), *Op.cit.*, p. 18.

38 CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, 'Notice - Canada lifts the visa requirement for visitors from Chile', press release, November 22, 2014, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/notices/2014-11-21a.asp> (consulted November 11, 2015).

39 HAGLUND (D.), 'The Canada-US Alliance in the Post-9/11 Context. Any room for Mexico?', in PAQUIN (J.) and JAMES (P.), *Op.cit.*, p. 231-250.; NOSSAL (K.R.), *Op.cit.*, p. 10-11 also believes that Canada and the US are in the same "geostrategic space", while Mexico is not. Both authors omit to mention that this space was constructed relatively recently, only after World War II, because Canada and the United States were in fact military rivals through most of their history. There is nothing natural, inevitable about this space.

40 TRINH (T.), 'Justin Trudeau Proposes Lifting Mexican Visa Requirement', CBC News online, June 22, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/justin-trudeau-proposes-lifting-mexican-visa-requirement-1.3122651> (consulted November 12, 2015)

41 *Ibid.*

42 SHANE (K.), 'Mexico Welcomes Chance to Rebuild Ties under Trudeau', Embassy News online, October 28, 2015, <http://www.embassynews.ca/news/2015/10/28/mexico-welcomes-chance-to-rebuild-ties-under-trudeau/47803> (consulted November 12, 2015).

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 MAS (S.), "Canada drops Mexican visa requirement, Mexico lifts beef ban", CBC News online, June 28, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-pena-nieto-bilateral-visas-beef-1.3655746> (consulted October 31, 2016)

46 GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, 'North American Leaders' Summit Ottawa 2016', online <http://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/campaign-campagne/nals-slna/nals-2016-slna.aspx?lang=eng> Indeed, the last time Canada has hosted the North American Summit was in 2007.

PDF généré automatiquement le 2020-06-24 02:04:46

Url de l'article : <https://popups.uliege.be:443/1374-3864/index.php?id=1645>