



The Relevance of the Mexico–Texas Relationship

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Good morning, mis amigos!

I am delighted to be here in Mexico City, and I am both honored and humbled to be here at the 80th annual Assembly and Convention of the American Society of Mexico, and to share ideas in this forum.

You might be wondering what a guy who runs a Texas-based think tank is here to speak with you.

I'm here because of the enormity of the U.S.–Mexico relationship. And most importantly, the Texas–Mexico relationship.

Mexico is one of America's top three trading partners, with more than \$660 billion in total trade in 2021. Only Canada had more, China was slightly less. These three countries are in a league of their own when it comes to U.S. trade.

The relationship between the U.S. and Mexico is of vital national importance.

And Texas—which shares the largest physical border, the largest trade relationship, and the greatest shared heritage and culture with Mexico—is at the center of that relationship.

I can assure you that your neighbors to the north wish you well, and that no one wishes for a prosperous and secure Mexico, as much as Texans.

Because we are not just neighbors, or trading partners—we are friends, with bonds going back generations. We are bound by a common heritage, a common border, and a common future.

The Society has an enormous job, and leading the society requires a tremendous leader.

I am indebted to Larry Rubin, President and Chairman of the Board of The American Society of Mexico, for inviting me to be here today.

We haven't known Larry for long—the first time he met with my Texas Public Policy Foundation colleagues was here in Mexico City just this past December—but we feel like we've known him for years. Larry's expertise, insight, generosity, candor, and goodwill have powerfully affected our own work in Mexico. The power of his friendship is a testament to both his intellect and his character. Larry—thank you for all you've done for us, and more importantly, for the U.S.–Mexico relationship that is the reason we are all here today.

A thank-you also to everyone at the American Society of Mexico—you have all done great work across generations, and you deserve all the recognition and accolades you receive today.

We are fortunate to have such strong leaders because the need for strong leaders with clear vision has never been greater.

The mission of the Society is “to help improve bilateral relations between our nations by “fostering friendship, cultural, business, and civic ties between the United States and Mexico.”

I am here today in the spirit of that friendship. Friendship means many things—cooperation, mutual aid, shared interests, and more—and it also means candor. Friends tell one another the truth—especially truths that no one else will.

I have come, as a friend, to speak truths about the Texas–Mexico relationship that must be said, and must be confronted, if our friendship is to flourish in the future as it has in the past.

I am not a pessimist. But not being a pessimist doesn’t make one an optimist.

We must embrace what author Jim Collins referred to as the Stockdale Paradox.

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest-ranking United States military officer in the infamous “Hanoi Hilton” prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War. He was tortured over twenty times during his eight-year imprisonment from 1965 to 1973. Stockdale lived out the war without any prisoner’s rights, no set release date, and no certainty as to whether he would even survive to see his family again.

As senior officer, Stockdale set the example of steadfast determination in the face of the enemy. As did many other POWs who survived the camp. But some didn’t make it. Their spirits were crushed, and they died.

When asked “Who didn’t make it out?” Stockdale said, “That’s easy—the optimists.”

The optimists were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go.

Then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come, and Easter would go.

And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again.

And they died of a broken heart.

Stockdale said, “This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

I have faith that Mexico can prevail. But first, we must confront the brutal facts.

A thriving and secure Mexico is not only in Mexico’s best interest, but as our neighbor, a thriving and secure Mexico is in the United States and Texas’ best interest.

Today, the prosperity and security of Mexico is threatened. And this threat is happening everywhere, but most acutely at the border we share.

The human toll is heartbreaking. There have been more than 1,000 fatalities on the U.S.–Mexico border since January 2021. This is when there was a dramatic shift in U.S. border policy, which triggered a massive wave of migration across Mexico, arriving at the border in anticipation of much easier access to the United States.

Most of these migrants were hopeful for a new life—and vulnerable to the criminals who would exploit and profit off of their hope.

And more than 1,000 people—that we know of—have died at the border since this policy began.

And the suffering doesn’t stop at the border. In July, a trailer with more than 60 migrants locked inside was abandoned by a smuggler. Fifty-three of those migrants died after being left in the sweltering heat on the outskirts of San Antonio.

The men, women, and children in that trailer were all seeking a better life. The idea of building a life in America was so powerful that they paid thousands of dollars to smugglers—coyotes—to get into the United States.

Being a migrant is not what defined them.

They are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters.

This is the humanity the traffickers refuse to see, worthy of the dignity and rights, not commodities to be exploited and discarded.

This is the difference between us and them. We see them as human beings. The cartels see them as disposable parts of a money-making machine.

Here is another brutal truth: The cartels take more than money from women and girls. Some are sold into the sex trade or into modern day slavery.

Those who work to assist and protect female migrants estimate that the vast majority of women and female children encounter some sort of sexual assault en route to the United States.

The Women's Refugee Committee reports that it has become the norm, and in many cases with female children, their case workers just assume that there's been some sort of incident.

As a husband, and as a father of two girls, it is hard not to think of them when confronting this horrific tragedy.

Rape, assault, and sexual slavery are an everyday fact of life for the women and children who attempt to cross.

And there is one root cause: The cartels have complete control over the southern side of the border.

If there is one law enforced, it is a very simple law: No one crosses for free.

Migrants pay a fee to cross. They get a wristband which tells the men at the border to let them attempt to cross the river.

No one crosses for free.

Those who attempt to cross without a wristband are often pulled from the river by the cartel and dealt with violently.

No one crosses for free.

You may be allowed to cross based on a partial payment, and your wrist band will tell other cartel members what you still owe.

And they WILL find you. Mexican cartels are highly organized money-making entities that specialize in the collection of data, and they know how and where to reach family members of those they traffic.

No one crosses for free.

And if you cross with a debt, you will repay that debt.

This system of advanced logistics exists ONLY where the state refuses to act.

The wristbands are part of a complex, intricate communication system that tallies the payments and most importantly, the debt.

But it's not just hopeful migrants crossing the border. Our over-worked Border Patrol has caught many criminals coming across the border. Some are cartel members and gang members extending their operations into the U.S. Some of those are people on the terrorist watch lists—not from Mexico, or even the Western Hemisphere—trying to enter the U.S. secretly, hiding themselves in the flood of humanity crossing the border day and night.

And whether transported by the criminals themselves or smuggled by the migrants on the orders of their coyotes, drugs are coming across the border in record amounts.

In the eyes of the cartel, every migrant is a potential drug mule.

Those drugs are killing Americans in record numbers.

One hundred thousand Americans died of drug overdoses in a single year between April 2020 and April 2021—a 30% increase from the same period the year before.

Most of these overdoses are attributed to fentanyl.

Sadly, fentanyl is a drug that needs no introduction.

Fentanyl is powerful. Fentanyl is cheap. And fentanyl is lethal in very small amounts.

And because fentanyl is so profitable for the cartels, the fentanyl problem of the United States is quickly becoming the fentanyl problem of Mexico.

Mexican pharmacologist Silvia Cruz said recently, “No one can really claim we are just producers. Where it’s produced, it’s consumed.”

Just as in the United States, it’s being mixed in with all kinds of drugs.

And just as in the United States, Mexican people are dying because of it.

Again, at the center of all of this activity are the cartels.

The cartels gain influence through violence, intimidation, extortion, and bribery.

The cartels gain footholds in the police forces, the military, and governments from the town mayor to the federal state.

The cartels expand their reach into the operations of large companies and federal agencies, where—whether motivated by fear of threats or hope of personal profit—it is often easier to look the other way.

Edmund Burke once said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” That is exactly what we are witnessing today.

This is how corruption takes root, and toleration of corruption leads to the inability to provide security for the Mexican people. It leads to the death of the industries that create prosperity.

Today, the cartels effectively control 30 to 40 percent of Mexico’s territory.

That is not a few bad apples.

Having 30 to 40 percent of Mexico’s territory controlled by the cartels is “industrial-scale” corruption.

Industrial-scale corruption requires the active involvement of the government to grant the cartels their influence.

Industrial-scale corruption is partnership between the cartels and the very Mexican state that ought to be protecting its own citizenry FROM cartels.

Industrial-scale corruption of Mexican civic life is a direct threat to Texas and our way of life.

Admiral Stockdale said we must have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of our current reality, whatever they might be.

His character was shaped in part by his time at the United States Naval Academy, where the phrase *Non Sibi Sed Patriae* is carved in stone over the chapel doors.

Non Sibi Sed Patriae. “Not for self, but for country.”

Confronting the brutal facts and putting country before self is not what is happening today.

This August, Mexico saw a wave of brutal attacks by the cartels—gunmen from some of Mexico’s most violent drug cartels rampaged across the country. They burned cars and buses.

They fired on troops. They shut down cities.

And what has the government response been?

It said that the extent of the violence had been exaggerated. It said that cartel attacks on civilians were part of ‘political conspiracy.’

Leadership is confronting the brutal facts, not ignoring them.

Leadership is not saying that the extent of the cartel violence is greatly exaggerated for political purposes.

Leadership is seeing how the crime hurts common, decent people, not claiming it to be part of a political conspiracy.

Leadership means holding those accountable who terrorize women and children as they migrate across Mexico to the United States.

Most people confuse courage with fearlessness. I will tell you that being fearless doesn’t make you courageous. In fact, having a healthy dose of fear is a good thing.

True courage is self-sacrifice for a just goal. Or as Admiral Stockdale saw every day, “Not For Self, But For Country.”

Leadership means confronting brutal facts and putting country before self.

Acting with courage and integrity is a choice. It takes integrity to acknowledge the full extent of the violence. It takes courage to confront this brutal reality.

With courage and integrity, leader can have faith that they will prevail in the end.

Admiral Stockdale understood the gravity of a leader’s moment of ethical decision.

He understood the power of his actions. He understood the impact of his choice to set the example for others.

The Mexican people deserve leaders with this kind of courage and integrity. Not for self, but for country.

This is the kind of leadership shown by the American Society of Mexico.

For 80 years, the Society has worked to advance the friendship, cultural, business, and civic ties that unite our nations.

The four pillars of the society—friendship, culture, business, and civics—are inseparable.

Throughout history, we have seen these elements combine to form great alliances and partnerships.

These elements build on each other. Friendships are forged and cultures are shared when we do business together—business that is conducted honestly and fairly in a shared framework of laws and policies which protects both parties.

There is a virtuous cycle of mutual benefit when things are good. Friendships grow deeper. Our cultures become intertwined. Our trading ties become deeper. And when we have issues to resolve, as all friends and business partners do, our disputes and disagreements are resolved fairly, with the goal of continuing to work together.

We share a common vision for what civic life should be.

Ordinary citizens with ordinary aspirations, and a desire for dignity, respect, and basic rights.

Some may say this is a modest vision. But it is the very least people should expect. We hope to cooperate to make this vision a reality.

Together, we can unite in our shared vision to secure a brighter future for us all.

Securing this future will require the Mexican state to stand by the people, not the cartels.

In Texas, we Texans can say with certainty that our state is fighting the cartels, and the human traffickers, with every means at its disposal. Can Mexicans say the same?

Don't Mexicans deserve to say the same?

Those of you who know Mexico City well know that there are several memorials to the desaparecidos in the city—the “disappeared” ones, the men and women who vanished in Mexico's ever-growing storm of violence and lawlessness. At each you see the same phrase:

Fue el estado—“it was the state.”

In a single phrase, the makers of these heartbreaking memorials express the obvious truth that Ambassadors and elites fear to say. It was the state.

It was the state that presided over this violence.

It was the state that tolerated this criminality.

It was the state that was too often indistinguishable from the criminals themselves.

When will we be able to point to a Mexico at peace, a Mexico that delivers justice to Mexicans, a Mexico that is a good neighbor ... and say fue el estado?

Until that day comes, the Texas Public Policy Foundation is working to change the policy landscape on the American side—on the Texan side—of our relationship. It isn't enough to hope for a concurrence of interest, and a desire for action, for our partners in Mexico.

We work to change the policy landscape because we believe one powerful truth: Policy matters.

Our country began with “We the People.”

And in Texas, we still believe that it is We the People that matter most.

We are a leader not because of our size and resources. We are a leader because Texas still puts We the People first. In our actions, and in the words that guide our actions. Our policies.

Because policy matters.

Good policy can make things better. Bad policy can destroy a nation.

I believe that Texas policy can help the people of Mexico create the conditions on our side of the border to support the change needed on our friend's side of the border.

The Texas Public Policy Foundations is going to advocate to do a few things:

- That the state of Texas declare an invasion underway, from cartel forces and their allies, under the U.S. Constitution's Article I, Section 10.
- That the U.S. federal government designate Mexican cartels as terror organizations.
- That Texas advocate that the U.S. government add Mexican public officials to the Engel list, and that Texas create its own, parallel list.
- That Texas must reform its state military apparatus, including the State and National guards.

These four policy changes will help Texas meet the challenges emanating from Mexico.

The time for Texas to act is long overdue.

The human tragedy is enormous. And the corruption is spreading north of the border as well.

We know that cartels have infiltrated and corrupted individuals in all levels of government, law enforcement, and corporations. We know that this corruption must be stopped, because we have seen it spread like a cancer.

I believe these policies are needed to help us fight back and win on our side of the border.

I believe that Texas has the authority, the responsibility, and the will to enact these policies to secure our border, and deprive the cartels of their source of power.

I believe if we do these things, in addition to our current efforts to fight the cartels, combat human trafficking, and stop the flow of drugs across the border, we can help create the conditions on our side of the border that will drive change on Mexico's side of the border.

It will take the will of the Mexican people—decent, hardworking, law-abiding people—to demand reform. When the cartels lose funding, they lose power, and when they lose power, they lose their hold on the police, the military, the businesses, and the governments they have infiltrated. When crime no longer pays, the Mexican government can do the right thing for its own citizens.

IF this happens, we can help create the conditions where good people can do the right thing.

What we cannot have is simple optimism. Hope is not a strategy.

Remember the lesson of the Stockdale Paradox: You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

We—your friends and neighbors—have faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of difficulties.

And we—your friends and neighbors—know that you have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

The facts are brutal.

And we must focus on what works.

The American Society of Mexico is an example of a US–Mexico relationship that works. We honor our heritage, and we celebrate 80 years of fostering friendship, cultural, business, and civic ties between the United States and Mexico.

We know that with clear eyes and full hearts, the Mexican people can restore civic life to Mexico. We know that business and civic leaders can take this great country back from the criminals. We have faith that you will prevail in the end.

We look forward to returning for the American Society of Mexico's centennial gathering in twenty years, to celebrate the triumph of a good relationship between good neighbors, to celebrate the friendship, cultural, business, and civic ties between the United States and Mexico—and to celebrate a safe, secure, and sovereign Mexico.

God Bless You, God Bless Texas, and God Bless Mexico!



Greg Sindelar
Chief Executive Officer

