

# **BI-NATIONAL RESPONSES TO EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS: COOPERATION BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES**

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## **Abstract:**

The last few decades have exhibited the inextricability of the people and environments of the United States and Mexico: U.S. relies upon Mexican labor and agricultural produce and the exploitation of the growing consumptive power of the Mexican market, whereas Mexico depends upon the flow of remitted earnings and international assembly plants that support marginalized rural and poor urban populations. Treaties (the Bracero Program, the Border Industrialization Program, the La Paz Agreement, and the North American Free Trade Agreement) have formalized this co-dependency. Disasters, emergencies, and environmental problems, particularly in the border zone shared by the two countries are usually shared calamities and the need for, demonstrated by the occasional practice of, bi-national cooperative emergency management is obvious. But what are the prospects for cooperation in light of growing antagonism and physical barriers? This paper reviews historical examples of cooperation between the U.S and Mexico during disasters and other emergencies and examines the implications of the anti-undocumented migrant sentiment and U.S. construction of the 700-mile (1167-km) border fence. Particular attention is paid to the issues of sovereignty, trade agreements, environmental accords, and approaches to emergency management and disaster response. We conclude that geography and political economic interactions have developed a dysfunctional but nonetheless necessary relationship. Indeed, their management of risks, hazards, and emergencies both fit their respective cultures yet reflect their political relationship. The region wherein the blending of American and Mexican cultures occurs (“the borderlands”) is particularly problematic due, in part, to the marginalization of all Latinos (Americans and non-Americans alike) and the lack of understanding of the Mexican (and Mexican-American culture).

## **Introduction**

The United States is building a wall between itself and Mexico, signaling the return to a divergence of each country’s interests. What are the implications of this divergence for the desire,

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ability, and capacity of these countries to cooperate in times of emergency or during disasters? How have cooperative emergency response and disaster relief between the United States and Mexico evolved during the last few decades and how have humanitarian aid, logistical support, and the spirit of cooperation been affected by this apparently worsening relationship? This paper examines the strength of ties between these two countries via their propensity to respond to each other's technical and humanitarian needs. We consider their disasters, "official" humanitarian aid exchanged between the two countries, and the historical contexts within which those exchanges occurred.

Since World War II, the U.S. and Mexico often exhibited the divergence of their political interests, even as their social and economic relationships grew to be inextricable and their problems were commonly shared (Ganster 1997; Purcell 1997; Domínguez and Fernández 2001). The U.S. became reliant upon Mexican labor, on Mexico's agricultural outputs, and upon Mexico's growing capacity for consumption of American goods and services, while Mexico grew dependent upon the flow of earnings remitted by migrant workers, on the U.S.'s function as a safety valve for impoverished Mexicans (by U.S. demand for low-wage workers), on "off-shore" U.S. assembly plants (*maquiladoras*) that employ otherwise unemployed populations within Mexico, and upon a stream of high quality goods from the United States (Ruiz 1998; Domínguez and Fernández 2001). Treaties (the Bracero Program, the Border Industrialization Program, and the La Paz (Mexico) Agreement) attempted to rectify the conflicts of mutual needs. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994 has formalized and cemented this co-dependency, however. The long-standing conflicts over traditional issues, immigration, drugs, and trade have resurged despite the convergence of regional policy reflected in NAFTA (Orme 1996; Purcell 1997). Mexico views the U.S. as a threat to Mexican culture, identity and sovereignty and the U.S. fears Mexico's economic drag, its production of drugs and crime, and its potential as a gateway for terrorists and other security threats (Willoughby 1997; Clement et al. 2005).

Two events of the 1980s weakened both countries' resistance to inevitable partnerships (Purcell 1997; Domínguez and Fernández 2001). The Mexican debt crisis, resulting partially from its isolationist economic views and its resistance to foreign investment, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which served to (ostensibly) end the Cold War, brought a warming of U.S. and Mexican diplomacy toward each other. These and other international developments (the regionalization of Europe and the growing political and economic importance of East Asia) set the stage for convergence via the geopolitically motivated economic integration of the NAFTA (Orme 1996; Ganster 1997; Purcell 1997; Domínguez and Fernández 2001; Clement et al. 2005; Lorey 2005).

Economic development and the populating of the region that straddles the United States-Mexico border have created a people and a place that are both a part of and apart from both countries (Stoddard 1969; Arreola and Curtis 1993; Ganster 1997; Herzog 2000). Modern adaptations to life in the southwestern deserts and scrublands, and human transformation of these lands, have increased economic, political, and cultural interactions of Mexicans and Americans. Economic opportunities continue to entice both temporary and long-term migrants from comparatively impoverished portions of Mexico into the United States, straining the politics of development as the U.S. lost competitive advantages, jobs, and profits to international markets. Mexico is the scapegoat for America's capitalism-inherent vulnerabilities and Mexican immigrant labor is regarded by many Americans as the fundamental cause of their plight (Clement et al. 2005).

Since World War II, global migration to the United States (both legal and illegal streams) has increased to rates not seen since the decade of the First World War. Though there is no doubt that both migration streams have assisted with the growth of the U.S. economy, the recent slowdown in job growth in the United States has heightened economic and social tension, particularly in blue-collar and service sectors of the economy. Unskilled American workers and physical laborers have felt the greatest competition from the new immigrants from developing countries and they have perceived the

tug on their wages. The benefits of this competition are felt by (and perhaps are even encouraged by) employers and consumers, but the working poor feel the pinch and “naturally” blame their competition (Lorey 2005).

Efforts to control illegal immigration into the United States have been increased in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. Xenophobic reactions to perceived threats from abroad have led some to focus on the prevention of infiltration (and integration) of foreigners into the United States through the difficult-to-patrol borderlands of the conterminous United States. Militarization of the 2000-mile southern U.S. boundary by National Guard troops and Homeland Security agents, increased spending by the U.S. Congress and the states, and the construction of 700 miles of physical barriers are the result of heightened concerns (Nevins 2002). These actions have led to bi-national perceptions of animosity, hatred, and racism, as well as heightened distrust between the governments of these nations. These feelings are unlikely to positively influence cooperation and humanitarian assistance between these governments (Domínguez and Fernández 2001). Despite this, or perhaps *because* of this difficult period in U.S.-Mexico relations, there have been a number of recent events that exhibit goodwill and even historically significant “firsts” in our relationships. Three of these events involved invited incursions into sovereign spaces by organizations providing emergency aid and disaster management assistance.

### **Theory and Methods**

The questions we reflect on in this paper are: Does the record of mutual aid and humanitarian assistance between the governments of the United States and Mexico reflect their political relationship (either directly or inversely)? What can we expect their evolving humanitarian relationship to be if there are no permanent solutions to the illegal immigration, security, or drug-trade questions? What can we expect to happen in terms of emergency aid and development assistance from the U.S. to Mexico if the relationship continues on the path toward divergence, separation and anxiety? Will the wall, if fully constructed, push the burden of humanitarian assistance and management of common problems more toward non-governmental organizations and/or the private sector? We will answer these questions by examining the historical record of disasters, relief, assistance and cooperation between Mexico and the United States and particularly in their borderlands.

### Major Disasters in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

Since 1985 (through February 2007), Mexico has experienced more than 125 significant disasters (CRED 2008). Of the 125 disasters reported by CRED, 30 could be categorized as “major” based upon arbitrary minimum limits of 100 deaths or \$100 million in damages or losses (Table 1). The largest disaster in terms of both death toll and disaster losses was the 1985 earthquake. The next largest in terms of death toll was the heat wave of 1990 in northern Mexico and the next largest by financial losses was the most recent event causing major flooding in Chiapas and Tabasco in 2007. Of the thirty major events, eight happened in one or more of the northern Mexican states bordering the United States, 6 occurred in central Mexican states, and sixteen in southern Mexican states. The northern disasters were caused primarily by droughts (five separate events), extreme heat, one hurricane, and a storm. The central Mexican disasters were produced by earthquakes (two), hurricanes (three), and extreme cold weather. The southern disasters were the result of ten hurricanes (or tropical storms), four floods, and two earthquakes.

Of the eight major borderlands disasters in Mexico, six likely affected the U.S.-side to a similar degree via drought and extreme heat. The other two events were associated with storms of rather limited areal extent and were unlikely to have directly impacted the southern U.S. borderlands. There were a few common significant events in the states bordering on the U.S. and Mexico boundaries. Most of these involved flooding either along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo and its tributaries or on ephemeral rivers perpendicular to and across the international boundary. One event in 2004 produced a rare cross-border airborne “incursion” by the U.S. government’s Custom Service and

Table 1. The Most Devastating (> fatalities or >\$100 Million) Disasters in Mexico 1985-2007

YEAR	EVENT	STATES EFFECTED	CASUALTIES, # AFFECTED, DAMAGES
1985	Earthquake	Mexico D.F., Michoacán, Jalisco	9,500 dead, 2,130,204 affected, \$4.104 billion
1988	Storm	Baja California Norte	\$250 million
1990	Extreme Heat	Northern Mexico	380 dead
1993	Tropical Storms Arlene & Beatriz	Guerrero, Oaxaca, Morelos	7 dead, 10,000 affected, \$1.67 billion
1995	Drought	Coahuila, Durango, Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon	\$100 million
1995	Hurricane Ismael	Sinaloa	105 dead, 40,000 affected, \$800 million
1995	Hurricane Opal	Campeche, Yucatan, Tabasco, Chiapas, Quintana Roo	19 dead, 3,000 affected, \$124.7 million
1995	Hurricane Roxanne	Campeche, Yucatan, Tabasco, Chiapas, Quintana Roo	29 dead, 20,000 affected, \$1.5 billion
1996	Drought	Northern Mexico	\$1.2 billion
1997	Hurricane Pauline	Acapulco, Guerrero, Oaxaca	230 dead, 830,200 affected, 447.8 million
1998	Floods	Chiapas, Veracruz, Baja California, Sinaloa	274 dead, 25,000 affected, \$602.7 million
1998	Floods	Veracruz	158 dead, 5,000 affected
1998	Hurricanes Madeline and Lester	Chiapas	240 dead, 3,000 affected
1998	Extreme Cold	Jalisco, Aguascalientes	100 dead
1999	Drought	Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Sonora, Sinaloa	65,000 affected, \$100 million
1999	Earthquake	Puebla, Oaxaca	15 dead, 16,200 affected, \$226.8 million
1999	Earthquake	Oaxaca	31 dead, 115,215 affected, \$164.8 million
1999	Floods	Veracruz, Tabasco, Michoacan, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla	636 dead, 616,060 affected, \$451.3 million
1999	Drought	Coahuila, Chihuahua, Durango, Sinaloa, Sonora	65,000, \$100 million
2001	Hurricane Juliette	Baja California	3 dead, 3,800 affected, \$400 million
2002	Drought	Baja California, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Sinaloa, Puebla, Sonora, San Luis Potosi	\$210 million
2002	Tropical Storm Isadore	Yucatan	13 dead, 500,030 affected, \$640 million
2002	Hurricane Kenna	Nayarit, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Colima	3 dead, 9,000, \$200 million
2003	Earthquake	Colima, Jalisco	29 dead, 178,603 affected, \$116.3 million
2003	Hurricane Marty	Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima	2 dead, 6,000 affected, \$100 million
2005	Hurricane Emily	Quintana Roo, Yucatan	2 dead, \$400 million
2005	Hurricane Stan	Chiapas, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, Hidalgo, Tabasco	36 dead, 1,954,571 affected, \$2.5 billion
2005	Hurricane Wilma	Yucatan, Quintana Roo	7 dead, 1,000,000 affected, \$5 billion
2007	Hurricane Dean	Yucatan, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Puebla	9 dead, 140,000 affected, \$600 million
2007	Floods	Chiapas, Tabasco	22 dead, 1.6 million affected, \$3 billion

Border Patrol (discussed below) to assist with emergency rescue of Mexican flood victims. Otherwise, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have been relatively quiet (in disaster terms).

### **Results: Bi-national Emergency Management and Assistance**

The American Red Cross's inaugural aid program to Mexico occurred during the Mexican Revolution, was not quickly agreed to by the United States' government, nor welcomed warmly by Mexico's provisional government. Both governments feared that the aid would be employed to assist the "wrong" side in the war. Not until many limitations were placed on the assistance was it effectively distributed to the victims of the conflict in the northern parts of Mexico (Paulson 1988). The reluctance of not only the Mexican government, but of Mexican communities was well known by the end of World War II. The rejection of international aid, particularly from the United States, was reported in the wake of devastating Rio Grande flooding of the border cities of Eagle Pass, Texas and Piedras Negras, Coahuila in 1954. Clifford's study in 1955 (cited in Stoddard 1969) found that cultural values were important to the effectiveness of aid. "*Dignidad*" (a Spanish term meaning "dignity, but imbued with patriotic or racial pride" (Stoddard 1969, p. 483)) led officials to habitually reject material aid from relief sources if acceptance might be inferred to mean that the government had failed in, or was incapable of, providing for its people. Thus *dignidad* was aimed particularly in response to the more powerful northern neighbor. This attitude persisted in Mexico's relationship with the United States until the 1980s, when Mexico's economic vulnerability and global geopolitics began to change. There is, in fact, no evidence that the United States even offered assistance to Mexico in response to any major disasters until 1985.

The 1985 earthquake in Mexico City was a signal event. It raised awareness of the earthquake risk in the basin and highlighted the vulnerability of the infrastructure and architecture built on very unstable sediments of the ancient lake bed. Further, it signaled a change in the acceptance of emergency assistance from the United States as Mexico responded to its largest disaster in decades. More than 9,500 people were killed and the financial impact exceeded \$4 billion dollars. Mexico was slow to accept most forms of assistance from the U.S., though it did request and accept U.S. search-and-rescue technicians, and a team of demolitions experts to reduce the hazards of collapsing buildings (Holley and Kempster 1985). The only other aid accepted was a \$1 million donation made during the "famous" disaster-site visit by the U.S. president's wife (Nancy Reagan) (Table 2).

This event, in the context of Mexico's 1980s peso crisis, began a warming of the U.S. and Mexico diplomatic relationship, though the next assistance the U.S. extended to Mexico came almost seven years later in response to the Guadalajara sewer explosion disaster (Table 2). Assistance from the United States, during the George H.W. Bush and William J. Clinton administrations, was usually directed through the American Red Cross, while governmental emergency assistance during George W. Bush's presidency focused on aid from U.S. international development (particularly USAID) funding. Assistance to Mexico during the first term of the Clinton era included technical assistance in the wake of the Guadalajara sewer explosion, monetary relief after mudslides and flooding from Hurricane Lester in 1993, and in response to Tropical Storm Gert in 1993.

Although Mexico incurred thirty disasters with either 100 or more casualties or more than \$100 million dollars in damages from 1985 to 2007, the United States provided material or financial assistance in response to only eleven; one occurring in the 1980s, four in the 1990s, and six since 2000. The last six emergencies occurred after the terrorism of September 11, 2001. The U.S., in fact, contributed monetary aid to six of the last eight major Mexican disasters. The first twenty-one "major" disasters after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, however, produced only one U.S. government disaster aid pledge, that occurring in 1997 in response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Pauline.

Table 2. U.S. Government Aid to Mexican Disasters and Emergencies: 1985 to 2007

DATE	EVENT	US AID SOURCE	AMOUNT
September 1985	Earthquake	Technical Assistance	Unknown
April 1992	Sewer Explosion	American RC	Unknown
January 1993	Hurricane Lester	US	\$ 25,000
September 1993	Tropical Storm Gert	American RC	In-kind
October 1997	Hurricane Pauline	US & PAHO	\$500,000
		Direct Relief Int.	\$213,000
October 2002	Hurricane Kenna	American RC	\$150,000
January 2003	Earthquake in Colima	American RC	\$100,000
October 2005	Hurricane Stan	IFRC	\$300,000
		USAID	\$300,000
November 2005	Hurricane Wilma	USAID	\$300,000
August 2007	Hurricane Dean	USAID to American	
		Red Cross to	
		Mex Cruz Roja	\$249,046
October 2007	Tabasco & Chiapas Floods	American RC	\$500,000
		USAID	\$ 50,000
		USAID	\$300,000
		USAID Supp.	\$1,700,000
		Samaritan's Purse	\$170,391
		World Vision USA	\$886,765
		Project Concern Int.	\$917,372

Sources: <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts>; <http://www.iadb.org/>.

Of the eleven events to which U.S. government aid has been extended to and accepted by Mexico, eight involved direct monetary donations to relief funds for food, shelter, medical supplies and other immediate necessities. One was in-kind donations of material goods for relief and two involved the donation of technical assistance in the wake of infrastructural disasters (the 1985 earthquake and the Guadalajara sewer explosion).

Assistance was also extended in an unusual event that was not among the most significant Mexican disasters. A flood event along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo near Piedras Negras in April of 2004, the U.S. Customs Service and Border Patrol rescued (by helicopter) fourteen Mexicans on Mexican "soil" after responding to a request for assistance from local representatives of the Mexican government.

Geographically speaking, the United States government's contributions for relief and emergency management assistance have tended to be aimed at Mexico's south. From 1985 to 2007, six emergencies to which the U.S. contributed occurred in central Mexico and five in the south; since 1997, five of seven were in the south. During the same period (1997 to 2007), thirteen of the twenty-one major disasters occurred in the southern states. The four northern disasters received no assistance from the U.S. and only two of the four central-region disasters were addressed by the U.S. government.

Do these temporal and spatial patterns simply reflect the geography of hazard-prone landscapes within Mexico or do they indicate that the U.S. has entered a new era of charitable emergency aid and relief commitments to Mexico? Are there possible explanations for this "sudden" responsiveness and generosity? Is there a potential rationale for the distribution of U.S. aid spatially? How has Mexico reciprocated in emergency response and disaster aid?

For its part, Mexico has viewed the United States to be rather immune to a need for disaster and/or emergency assistance. In general, other nations of the world (and the U.S.

itself) have seen the United States as a self-sufficient responder to disasters or emergencies in its midst. The U.S. is widely assumed to have the technical capacity to meet all of its logistical and technical needs in the context of an emergency. Historically, this has been generally true, but was perceived to have changed with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001. That event raised the specter of vulnerability to a nation (and to the rest of the world) that believed itself (it) invulnerable. The world community looked upon the U.S. for the first time (in perhaps a half century) as a victim, and rallied to its side. Offers of support (moral, technical, financial and otherwise) poured in from old friends and new allies alike. U.S. acceptance of aid was slow in coming and was usually declined.

Over the subsequent four years, the U.S. government lost the goodwill associated with its victim status. Moreover, the U.S. found itself in late 2005, mired in a hurricane-induced disaster that highlighted its own persistent emergency management vulnerabilities. In the late summer 2005 landfall of Katrina exposed the reduced U.S. capacity for effective emergency response and disaster management; this was in no small way due to the rise of “homeland security” and the restructuring of the Federal Emergency Management Agency within the newly created Department of Homeland Security. Hurricane Katrina was the most costly disaster the U.S. had ever faced and the government’s resistance to assistance was weakened. Within days, Mexico’s naval ship Papaloapan departed Tampico, Mexico for New Orleans, Louisiana, delivering aid to local victims of the flooding from the storm. Mexico’s army crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in southern Texas a few days later with a convoy of 200 unarmed personnel bearing food and medical supplies to minister to Louisiana refugees that had evacuated to San Antonio, Texas. Both shipments of emergency aid were accepted and were welcomed by the weakened and disorganized U.S. federal government (Levy 2005; Stevenson 2005). This marked the first time that the U.S. welcomed Mexico’s generosity and the first time the Mexican army had been on American soil since the Mexican revolution of the early 1900s.

Mutual aid has morphed into true cooperation during a recent disaster. Wildfires engulfed many areas of southern California during October of 2007. In the spirit of both self-preservation and camaraderie, sixty firefighters from the cities of Tijuana and Tecate, Baja California Norte were sent on October 22<sup>nd</sup> to join federal, state and local firefighters in the U.S. Due to the eruptions of wildfires in Mexico, however, they returned to fight “their own” fires the following day. Mexico’s federal forestry agency SEMARNAT provided thirty-two additional forestry experts to assist with the task of controlling the fires (Associated Press 2007).

Programmatically speaking, however, one U.S. government agency, since the 1983 La Paz Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment in the Border Area, has engaged with Mexico in a cross-border program to enhance the capacity of their shared borderlands to prevent, respond to, and clean up environmental problems. Real action on this agreement began after the 1992 joint-release of the Integrated Environmental Plan for the Mexican-U.S. Border Area (IBEP). From 1996 to 2001 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency collaborated with the Mexican environmental agency (*Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* or SEMARNAT) in the Border XXI program. This program sought to spawn public involvement in local, bottom-up, decentralized, cooperative environmental planning, management and cooperation in twin cities along the border. One working group within the Border XXI program was the Contingency Planning and Emergency Response Workgroup (USEPA 2008). The main concerns of this group were focused on hazardous materials management, cross-border notification systems and joint contingency planning for chemical accidents. The goals for each interest area were the achievement of operational plans for each community along the border by the end of 2001. Unfortunately, these goals were only partially met. By 2001, 167 emergency incident notifications were recorded for areas on both sides within 100 kilometers

of the border (126 of those in the U.S. border region), but by 2001, only 8 of the 14 sister-city pairs had signed emergency plans (USEPA 2006b).

In 2003, the USEPA and SEMARNAT renewed their commitment and set new goals for the environmental programs on which they were collaborating by inaugurating the Border 2012 Program (USEPA 2008b). Of the six broad goal-sets that dealt with “environmental problems” (the reduction of air and water pollution, land degradation, environmental health improvement, environmental stewardship, and emergency preparedness and response), only one is relevant to this discussion. Three “guiding principles” were established to measure the progress that was to be made in the decade: the establishment of a cross-border emergency chemical advisory/notification mechanism by 2004, joint contingency plans for all 14 pairs of sister cities in place and operating by 2008, and 50 percent of the joint contingency plans would be supplemented with preparedness and prevention efforts by 2012 (USEPA 2007). According to the mid-decade progress report, the notification mechanism appears to be in place (this is not fully clear from the data). The 2002 through 2005 annual notification totals from both sides of the border were 209, 118, 205, and 145, respectively. By 2006, thirteen of the fourteen original city pairs had plans in place, one new city pair had produced an emergency plan, one had revised or updated their original plan and one city pair (El Paso & Ciudad Juarez) had failed to complete their emergency preparedness plan (USEPA 2006b). Joint training exercises and real emergencies have tested the capacities of cross-border cooperation in several of the border twins. At least eight assorted “minor” (relative to the list of major events discussed previously) technological and natural disasters from 2004 through 2005 have involved collaborative response between border entities (USEPA 2006a). It appears that progress is being made in developing an environment of cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico when it comes to emergency management and disaster reduction, despite a concurrent worsening of their political relationship.

## **Discussion**

### The Relationship between Political Relationships and Government Assistance

Based upon the publicly available record of governmental aid and assistance between the U.S. and Mexico, it appears that there have been a number of significant political shifts that have affected humanitarian cooperation. There is no doubt that the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico during the last fifty years has warmed and cooled. Each has perceived their neighbor to be the cause of their internal (usually economic) problems. The response, during the 1980s, to converge and work together politically, appeared to have enabled U.S. humanitarian assistance, particularly aimed southward at the source regions for Mexico’s immigrant streams to the United States. The U.S. was less responsive to disasters in the northern border states of Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s, from which we can infer a policy of aiming to reduce the recovery of the border in order to discourage immigration from the south. Could it be that the U.S. was recognizing that their effort to economically develop the border region (spatially limited by the BIP agreement in 1964) in order to keep migrant labor on the Mexico side after the Bracero Program was cancelled only led to a northward movement of population from the less developed regions to the south? Did the U.S. government policy evolve, via NAFTA and its subsequent accords, to encourage “deeper” patterns of development into southern Mexico and even into Central America? Did policymakers recognize that uneven development patterns were part of the mechanism driving illegal immigration, drug trafficking and organized crime?

U.S. policy toward Mexico during the last decade seems to have shifted to divergence and separation, while humanitarian aid has begun to flow in both directions. U.S. humanitarian aid evolved into foreign development rather than simply support for response and recovery. Further, it appears (though the archival record is currently weakest on this conclusion) that government (and quasi-governmental) assistance is declining and humanitarian aid is flowing in greater amounts from the private non-profits. Further, the use



of a single government agency (the USEPA) to foster a cross-border cooperative initiative may be another way to reduce the role of (and need for) the federal government and increase the burden and responsibility of local communities. The rationale may be that humanitarian aid, emergency response assistance, and development may be the tools that soften the blow of a harder, more militarized border (and politics) between the United States and Mexico and NGOs, quasi-governmental organizations (The American Red Cross), private donors (e.g. World Vision USA, Project Concern International, and Samaritan's Purse), and local communities will be "employed" to wield those tools.

Geography and U.S.-Mexico political and economic relationships have created a dysfunctional "marriage" in which trust and fondness are weak. In times of need they have found they cannot ignore the other's suffering, yet when disasters pass their problems return to the forefront. Neither could survive without the other and neither would be what they are if not for their shared borderlands. The region wherein the blending of American and Mexican cultures occurs is particularly problematic as this is where the contradiction of policies and actions has played out: communities are integrating their environmental management and disaster response programs while the government constructs a physical barrier between these same communities.

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