



COLLEAGUES FOR THE AMERICAS SEMINAR SERIES

“US-Mexico Security Relations: The Possibility of a Strategic Partnership”

May 22, 2006

Featured Speaker: Suzanne J. Petrie, Director for Latin America, Department of Homeland Security

Suzanne J. Petrie currently serves as the Director for Latin America for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As a Director in the Assistant Secretariat for International Affairs, she is responsible for overall DHS coordination within North America, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, as well as management of U.S.-Mexico border issues. Her work includes strategy, policy creation and execution, federal and international coordination of security and immigration policy and programs within the Hemisphere. Ms. Petrie has served in various posts related to the hemisphere including serving as Mexico Director in the White House Drug Policy Office. Between 2000 and 2004 Ms. Petrie served as Director for North American Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. During her time there she coordinated Secretary Rumsfeld’s bilateral meeting coordinator for the Defense Ministerial of the Americas IV and V. She has been recognized for her contributions as both a civilian and academic, including being named staff “Civilian of the Year” in 1998 for her work as Director for Latin American Programs at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Ms. Petrie is a Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government Senior Executive Fellow.

A summary of the seminar follows.

Border Partnerships

A strategic North American partnership between the US, Mexico and Canada should be based on mutual interests and a cooperative spirit in implementation. This collaboration is largely outlined in the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) signed by the three governments with three main objectives: securing North America from external threats, preventing and responding to threats within North America, and streamlining the flow of low-risk traffic across our common borders. In establishing the SPP, the US and Mexico built upon the existing 22-point Action Plan, signed in 2004, that seeks cooperation in three main areas; the secure flow of goods, secure flow of people, and secure infrastructure. One commonality that both the 22 pt plan and the SPP have in common is their approach to mitigating risk. This concept streamlines the flow of legal and low-risk individuals and legal commerce across the border, therefore allowing border enforcement officials to focus their efforts on unknown people and shippers that may intend to exploit our common borders. Aside from legal crossings, there are foreign nationals that cross our borders illegally; an effective way to minimize illegal crossings, which often

endanger lives, is through a comprehensive North American approach. Coordination of a visa policy among all three countries is an important commitment to ensure that all travelers, regardless of destination receive adequate screening. An overarching goal of the SPP is to institutionalize political will in common areas in order to forge a path that can survive political change in any of the three countries.

New Approaches for a Dynamic Border

There are other new and less traditional areas of cooperation that will require enhanced joint efforts between the US and Mexico. New areas of collaboration are being defined, such as efforts between public and private partnerships. Recognizing the role of the private sector in border management, successful partnerships at the State and Federal level has yielded construction of a FAST lane in Nogales and increased usage of technology for quicker processing of individuals and cargo. This one example highlights a positive partnership between the Department of Homeland Security, the State of Arizona, and the private sector that could be modified and implemented in other ways. The border must allow the safe and orderly flow of people and commerce. New humanitarian public awareness programs such as “*no mas cruces*” have addressed the issue of migrant safety. For the third consecutive year, DHS elements will jointly implement the Interior Repatriation Program with the Government of Mexico to safely return migrants to their hometowns thus breaking the chain of exploitation inflicted by smugglers and human traffickers that prey upon migrants in border towns. The Operation Against Smugglers (and Traffickers) in Safety and Security initiative (OASISS) is a joint venture with Mexican officials to prosecute smugglers and human traffickers who criminally exploit border areas and endanger migrant lives. This program allows information sharing for the prosecution of individuals that streamlines the judicial process as well as standardizes prosecution guidelines. Local mechanisms have to be in place in order for local officials to effectively deal with the varying problems that a dynamic border entails. In dealing with border security, DHS and Mexican officials have teamed up to in other areas to save lives; Border Patrol’s Search, Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) teams not only actively save lives in the desert, they also provide humanitarian training to foreign counterparts upon request. Cooperation and collaboration is vital to success as the border has both domestic and international elements that must be managed politically and operationally.

Cooperation beyond Security

After 9/11, border security and immigration have become even more politically charged. It is important to remember that collaboration goes beyond finding ways to deal with the mass movement of people and commerce. Both sides have held bilateral talks to discuss how to address pandemics and how to better coordinate emergency management. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the importance and impact of responding together in a time of crisis. Preparedness goes beyond natural disasters; there are other areas of protection that are being discussed such as telecommunications and cyber security. Addressing the full spectrum of infrastructure security will be important for successful economic vitality and collective security. This is an area where the US could enhance and strengthen its strategic relationship with Mexico. While the SPP creates framework for North American collaboration, it was not done at the exclusion of other

countries in the hemisphere; rather is a model for managing the intermestic issue of border management with our closest neighbors. The border is not an easy issue to discuss, there are many economic, social, and political implications in finding solutions, however, its has to be managed effectively. A comprehensive approach that brings together the US and Mexico (as well as Canada) and clearly articulates shared and realistic goals will remain vital. Security is not just a US concern, there are many economic and political implications for Mexico and Canada that require collective thinking and collective management. The US relationship with its neighboring countries is still evolving. Strained budgets and limited personnel seemingly from all sides make planning and preserving programs a difficult task. There are still many areas to address however it is imperative to keep working towards mutual interest in order to maintain the accessibility of secure yet open borders for commerce and people.

The INSS Colleagues for the Americas Seminar Series is a program of monthly meetings that commenced in 1994 to further research on hemispheric security and defense issues and to contribute to the professional education of United States and foreign practitioners.

The opinions, conclusions and recommendations expressed or implied within this report are those of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government.

For more information about this report or the "Colleagues for the Americas" program, please contact Mr. John Cope, tel.: 202-685-2373, e-mail: copej@ndu.edu.