



Antonio O. Garza: Mexico's march toward prosperity is also ours

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Be it an [earthquake in Haiti](#) or the violent drug war fought in Mexico today, the [United States](#) can ill afford to turn a blind eye to our neighbors in this hemisphere.

The hope of a strong recovery in 2010 is vital for the region, as is the need to understand how our [neighbors'](#) actions can affect the U.S. economy and our security.

And nowhere is that more critical than in the relationship between [Mexico](#) and the United States.

By virtue of geography, economies and, increasingly, our cultures, Mexico is more integrated with the U.S. than any other Latin American country. At the same [time](#), Mexico shares strong ties to Latin America by virtue of its history and strong linguistic and emotional connections.

Now more than ever, we must view Mexico not only as a neighbor and trading partner but also a strategic ally poised to play a pivotal role in hemispheric security.

Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton](#) recently cautioned Venezuela and Bolivia to "think twice" about their ties with Iran and rightly said there would be consequences for those choosing to cozy up to the "major supporter, exporter and promoter of terrorism in the world."

Mexico, along with countries like Brazil, Colombia and Chile, have demonstrated their commitment to democracy and open markets, and in doing so, make the best allies. And, perhaps none more than Mexico are as well positioned to be a credible leader and messenger in the hemisphere.

Noted economist Arturo Porzecanski recently wrote, "This may well be the first [time since Latin America](#) gained its independence in the early 1800s that a major economic contraction and financial calamity in the industrialized world has not caused a wave of currency, sovereign debt or banking crises in the region."

It's no secret that the countries Porzecanski wrote about are those same nations that embrace free markets and democracy and are far better positioned to reap the benefits of globalization.

Last year was a [challenging one for Mexico](#), and the country did in fact lag in the region; Mexico closed out 2009 with near 7 percent contraction in GDP. While most analysts project GDP growth for 2010, we cannot ignore the real challenges that remain for Mexico and their impact on the U.S.

Chief among them are the drug cartels and their ability to undermine security, a threat that must be confronted aggressively and in partnership with the United States.

The death and capture of two drug cartel leaders late last year – coupled with funding and implementation for the Mérida Initiative – suggest real progress. The Calderón administration remains committed to fighting this war head on, and the U.S., for its part, is providing the kind of financial, political and logistical support so critical to success.

On the economic side, declining oil production, a decrease in foreign direct investment and a still struggling tourism sector pose significant obstacles to growth.

Fortunately, Mexico is headlong into a public debate aimed at addressing the profound structural reforms so vital to the creation of real jobs and opportunity.

And while Mexico undertakes that debate, it will continue to benefit from the country's "just in time" access to North and Latin American markets and its economically active population of over 40 million, offering trading partners a solid manufacturing platform and growing consumer base – keys to prosperity on either side of our borders.

So while the challenges are significant, it's time to act on this hemispheric truth: Mexico's march toward greater security, stability and prosperity is ours, as well.

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