

To be fair to Fox, an attempt has been made to stamp out corruption in Mexico, and the issue of domestic human rights (in which Mexico has a poor record) has been addressed for the first time in decades. The fact that the PAN defeated the PRI (in power for some seven decades, and widely viewed as practicing fraudulent elections) symbolized the intent of the new approach now being taken by Fox. If Mexico was attempting to deal head on with human rights abuses and the need for democratization at home, ran the argument, then it was legitimate to do so in regards to other countries too. The formerly untouchable doctrine of "non-intervention" in the affairs of another state was thus unceremoniously--if selectively--dumped. (And if this political volte-face also garnered favour in Washington, even better). A new approach had officially been adopted by the Fox administration, and old values--including the relationship with revolutionary Cuba--were expendable.

In addition to a reinvigorated interest in political democracy and respect for human rights, Mexico also confronted a new international agenda. Increasingly its economy was identified with that of the United States, perhaps not a surprising development since Vicente Fox had a wealth of international business experience (and in particular with the United States), and in fact had been president of Coca Cola de México. In addition Mexico now depended upon the United States for trade--80% of commerce was now with the powerful neighbour to the north--leading to the reflection of José Martí's idea that "el que compra, manda". A major push for even closer business ties ensued, and at the beginning of his administration there was great hope that the Bush administration would allow undocumented Mexican workers to legalize their situation in the United States.

This would have several benefits for Mexico--creating desperately needed employment for young Mexicans, producing billions of dollars in remittance money for Mexican communities, and professionalizing the image of Mexico in the United States. It was something which Fox and Castañeda badly wanted. Unfortunately just when this goal seemed attainable (President George W. Bush had earlier remarked that no other foreign relationship was more important than that which the United States enjoyed with Mexico), the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in September of 2001 caused this expectation to be instantly frozen. Thereafter Washington pursued aggressively an agenda of domestic security, defined narrowly on its own terms. In these new circumstances, Mexico's hopes for border controls to be loosened were soon rudely dashed. Instead Washington was now keen to develop a perimeter-wide security barrier around Canada, Mexico and the United States, and possibly even more widely. Making more flexible immigration arrangements was the last thing that Washington would now consider. The ambitious plans of Fox and Castañeda were instantly mothballed.

Despite this major setback in bilateral relations, in general the Fox government has remained close to the agenda of Washington (although its rejection of an invitation to join with the United States in supporting the war in Iraq is noteworthy, possibly in part because of its disappointment over the issue of undocumented Mexican workers in the United States, and the tactical need to show "distance" from the U.S. position). NAFTA and the proposed FTAA are seen by the Mexican business sectors as an important lifeline--a process which implies