



September 10, 2025

SPEECH | Mexico City, Mexico

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MEXICO'S 4TH BINATIONAL CONVENTION

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Thank you to the American Society of Mexico for having me back, and thank you especially to Larry Rubin for your friendship, your vision, your leadership, and your love for both America and Mexico. That love is evident in your tireless work in bridging the gap—sometimes a chasm—between our two nations, and I know your motivations are as selfless and virtuous as they come. Mexico is deeply fortunate to have a friend like you—and so are we. If any one of us could do a hundredth of what you do, day in and day out, for this relationship and all within it, we'd have nothing left to do but celebrate.

Of course, the reality is that, in surveying the US-Mexico relationship now, we have much more cause for concern than celebration.

Three years ago, I stood before you to deliver a keynote in a very different political environment. Both America and Mexico were suffering under a political elite who put their own interests over their countrymen's. In America, President Biden couldn't ever seek to discern the American interest, much less enforce it—and here in Mexico, similar interests plunged the Mexican state into a disrepute from which it has yet to recover. The damage done in the overlap of the two will take years to assess and generations to repair. Unfortunately, we cannot wait for the verdict of history: we must write that verdict ourselves.

Three years ago, I said to this very gathering that the situation at the US-Mexico border was so grave, so urgent, and so qualitatively unique that it met the definition of invasion as understood by the drafters of the United States Constitution: not just a massive and ongoing violation of our sovereignty, but also an effort to overthrow governance itself in its breadth and activity. Undertaken by a criminal group, this would have been bad enough. What made it especially terrible was the realization that major elements of the Mexican state at the highest levels were allied with, profiting from, and actively assisting the narco cartels in moving their grim traffic of drugs and humanity into the United States.

Talk to Mexicans at any time across the past two decades, and they'll tell you that Mexicans suffer more than Americans from this cartel activity—and it's true. Mexicans are totally right about that. That only makes the cooperation more indefensible due to the infliction of this suffering upon its people.



Luckily, today is not three years ago. This is 2025, not 2022. We have new presidents in both countries and a new security chief in Mexico. The US-Mexico border is quieter than it has been in years. The Mexican state has been sending narcos north, for well-deserved justice, by the dozens. And, just a few days back, Mexico and the United States agreed to a cooperative framework, during the visit of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, that commits both countries to principles of action, even as the details remain under wraps.

For many in Mexican governance, it therefore becomes a source of exasperation (as the New York Times reported several days back) that the Americans seem unsatisfied. What more could we want? What else do we need? Why are we demanding still more on security? Why are we talking about tariffs? Why are we talking about taxing remittances? Why, in short, are we not accepting the narrative straight from the *Palacio Nacional* that crime is down, cooperation is great, and our problems are over?

Well, I'm here to tell you why. It comes down to one simple word:

Trust.

Trust, above all else, is what the United States of America lost in Mexico across the past *sexenio*. What was eradicated across years will not be rebuilt in months, nor is it fully reestablished by a cooperative framework. Things may or may not be improving—we will find out in the fullness of time—but if they are, it does not mean all is now well.

As a friend speaking candidly, let me tell you what we in American policy and governance have learned in 2025:

- ★ We learned that the border could have been controlled at any time.
- ★ We learned that the narcos could have been arrested and extradited *at any time*.
- ★ We learned that all the chaos, murder, and trafficking emanating from Mexico was a *positive choice* made by the Mexican state at the highest levels.

We did not forget any of this just because cooperation and security have improved since the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump.

And so, we ask, very rationally: what do we need to do to ensure we never return to where we were just a few months ago? If there is one thing that feels certain, it is that this will happen again. I say this because as long we don't see permanent changes to the Mexican civil society and governance, it will happen again. As long as the rule of law is undermined by those who take cartel money, does cartel business, and advocates for cartel interests, trust will never be restored.

We ask impatiently, when will we see movement against corrupt influences who undermine the US-Mexico relationship? When will we see corrupt narco-politicians finally held accountable for the terror inflicted upon Americans and Mexicans alike? This is why we are unimpressed with the periodic transfers of narcos north. That is necessary, to be sure, but it is not sufficient. The regime will sacrifice unlimited numbers of narcos to placate the Americans, and it should. But



we long for and demand accountability for the *political* leadership that empowered them. Where are the *officeholders* without whom those criminals could not function? Where is the *military leadership* that actively participates in the trafficking?

Where is their accountability?

There are Americans dead on American soil because of these corrupt actors, and they deserve justice.

We are not satisfied with window dressing. We are not content with gestures. While grateful for a promising start under our new administrations, we want *results*.

A senior Mexican official recently asked one of my colleagues why Mexico was not receiving credit for all it has done this year: again, a quiet border, extraditions, and so on. The implication was that America was ungrateful, unjust, and excessive in its expectations. My colleague's answer is mine as well: Mexico fulfilling the most-basic duties of a state—to fight crime and to control its borders—is literally the *least* that should be expected of it. If the Mexican state's own leadership believes it deserves rewards for meeting the bare minimum, then it is lost in its own dreamland and insensible to the mind and sentiment of its most-important neighbor.

We on the north side of the border watch what the Mexican state says and does, and we take note.

- ★ We take note when Mexican politicians lecture on sovereignty while looking the other way as sovereignty is surrendered to criminal cartels.
- ★ We take note when Mexican politicians pontificate on rights, while overseeing the dismantlement of independent Mexican civil society.
- ★ We take note when Mexican politicians insist upon technical legality and process, while justice goes undone.
- ★ We take note when Mexican politicians inveigh against intervention, while aggressively pursuing the most interventionist foreign policy in the entire Western hemisphere.

Americans interpret all this as a betrayal. You see, despite all the anti-Americanism in rhetoric and policy that emanates from south of the border, Americans do not reciprocate its contempt, and certainly not its export of violence. We possess an innate generosity and goodwill toward Mexico at large, as we always have. We desire a Mexico that is fully prosperous, fully sovereign, and fully free.

A generation ago, America laid a bet on Mexico. It was a bet that Mexico would liberalize, a bet that Mexico would be a friend to the United States, and a bet that Mexico would be bound to us by a common interest. That bet, and our confidence in it, was made concrete in NAFTA—a trade agreement, not an alliance, but as close to an alliance as a trade agreement could possibly be. We had that confidence in Mexico, and that trust.

And—let me be crystal clear—we expressed the profundity of that trust by sacrificing the industry and livelihoods of American communities in the Ohio River Valley, in the Great Lakes



region, and beyond so that those industries could move and flourish in Monterey, in Guanajuato, in Ciudad Juarez, and elsewhere.

To end where I began: that trust is now gone.

The trust is gone, and our bet on Mexico has gone bad. Mexico has not liberalized; instead, it is evermore autocratic. Mexico is not a friend to the United States; instead, it views us with contempt. Mexico is not bound to us by a common interest; instead, it seizes every opportunity to remind us where interests diverge, and it aggravates those differences in the most destructive way possible. Perhaps in a year I can come back and tell you that the cooperative framework has changed all that. I certainly hope so. We will watch, but not wait.

If one had to go back to 1994 and answer the question, “What did America get for NAFTA after a generation?” the sad answer would have to be, “Nothing.” We sacrificed our communities for nothing.

That wasn't always true.

If you want to know why the Americans have in 2025 discussed military intervention in Mexico, this is why. No one wants it, but the duty to protect the nation is inherent in every state. The power to stop that—to make it unnecessary to even *consider*—is in Mexico City, not Washington, D.C. It is in the *Palacio Nacional*, not the White House. Hitherto the Mexican regime has tried to forestall it by tactics—but the time for tactics is past.

Whether they see it and act accordingly is a test of statesmanship whose outcome is wholly in their hands.

My friends, all this is hard to hear. But this is not a presidential *mañanera* of the sort to which you have become accustomed across these past several years. I am not here to deliver a canned narrative, but plain reality. Mexico and the United States will be neighbors forever. Whether that is a blessing or a curse is up to us. From my leadership roles in both Austin, Texas, and Washington, D.C., I can tell you directly that every level of American policy and politics wants it to be a blessing.

But that requires two parties.

Mexico must make its choice.

Thank you.

