

The *Three Amigos* Unite: An Inside Look at the Summit of North American Leaders

****Simone Lucatello**

In January 2023, the “*Three Amigos*” (USA, Canada and Mexico) gathered in Mexico City to hold the Summit of the North American Leaders (SNAL), convening in one of the most important diplomatic events of the year. President Biden, Prime Minister Trudeau and President López Obrador met in a three-day meetings and conference to discuss mainly the strengthening of important long-term cooperation to make North America a more economically and competitive area, prepared to face global challenges. Main topics included the future relations with China and other partners around the world. It was also the opportunity to talk about security, migration, climate change and possible future threats for the region. Here a brief of the summit.

Introduction to the Summit of North American Leaders

The Summit of North American Leaders is an annual event that brings the leaders of the United States, Mexico, and Canada together to discuss the pressing issues facing the continent. This year, the Summit of North American Leaders was held in Mexico City, Mexico from January 20-23, 2023. The Summit of North American Leaders was a chance for the three countries to come together and discuss the issues that impact the whole of North America. This includes economic, social, and environmental issues. It is also a chance for the three countries to collaborate on solutions to these issues. The event also represented the opportunity to celebrate three decades of trade partnership. The trade relationship between the three countries deepened significantly in 1994 with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passage. In mid-2017, renegotiations began, leading to the July 2020 entry into force of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The new pact includes significant updates to NAFTA, including higher regional rules of origin for the auto industry, a rapid response mechanism for labor disputes, and stronger enforcement provisions. The accord also updated or incorporated new digital trade, anti-corruption, and environmental provisions. In addition, USMCA includes a sunset clause that terminates the deal after 16 years unless each party expresses interest in continuing. There is a planned joint review every six years after implementation.

History of the Summit of North American Leaders

The Summit of North American Leaders has been held annually since 2005. The first Summit was held in Waco, Texas and was attended by then United States President George W. Bush, Mexican President Vicente Fox, and Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin. Since then, the Summit has been held in various locations

throughout North America and has become an important forum for the leaders of the three countries to come together and discuss the issues facing the continent. The NALS undergone several changes over the years. In 2011, the Summit was expanded to include three additional countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. However, the Summit was once again restricted to just the three North American countries in 2015. Since then, the Summit has focused solely on the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

The importance of the summit rest upon a robust trade and economic integration of the Three Amigos. Here some facts and figures to understand the role of the economic block of North America. Regional integration has made North America an economic powerful region. The region accounts for a third of the Global GDP, and its combined GDP has more than doubled over the past decade. The U.S. traded more than \$3 million per minute in goods with its neighbors from January through October 2022. Mexico and Canada were the top U.S. trade partners in 2021, accounting for double of the US-China Trade Volume.

Roughly 79% of Canadian exports to the U.S. are incorporated into U.S. final goods. Around 40% of the value of Mexican exports to the U.S. are made up of U.S. components. More than 5 million jobs in the United States depend on trade with Mexico. The manufacturing sector is crucial to growing Mexico's economy. Mexico experienced a nearly 30% increase in FDI year on year during the first nine months of 2022. The United States and Canada are Mexico's two largest foreign investors, accounting for 39% and 10% of FDI in the country, respectively. The manufacturing sector was by far the largest recipient at 36% of FDI.

Key Deliverables from the Summit of North American Leaders

Immigration: President Biden announced his country will expand a migration parole program started in October 2022 to admit as many as 30,000 migrants a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela who have eligible sponsors. The program previously covered only 24,000 total Venezuelan migrants. Still, other newly announced measures empower the government to expedite the removal of migrants who cross the U.S., Mexican, and Panamanian borders unlawfully. A new challenge for North American migration policy involves shifting dynamics. In FY2022, migrants from beyond Mexico and Northern Triangle countries accounted for 43% of border apprehensions in the U.S.-Mexico border. Venezuelans, Cubans, and Nicaraguans accounted for a larger number of migrants during that period than did Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans.

Security Cooperation. U.S.-Mexico security cooperation long fell under the umbrella of the Merida Initiative, which was first announced in 2007 and involved

\$3.3 billion in U.S. security assistance to Mexico. Over time, Mérida's focus shifted from providing military equipment to strengthening the rule of law and resilient communities based on "shared responsibility." In October 2021, the two countries launched the High-Level Security Dialogue (HLSD) and unveiled Mérida's replacement: the Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities with three main goals: a) protecting both countries' citizens, b) preventing transborder crime, and 3) dismantling criminal networks. Canada works with the other two countries through the North American Drug Dialogue (NADD), which has served as a mechanism for addressing trilateral drug threats since 2016. During the summit, particular attention was paid to the the fentanyl issue, mostly produced by Mexican Narco cartels. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration seized 50.6 million fentanyl-laced fake prescription pills in 2022, up from 20.4 million in 2021 and consider it a major threat to US citizen health.

At the same time Mexico, continued to raise concerns about arms trafficking from the US, the global major producer. Mexico experienced almost 40,000 murders due to US illegal arms trafficked into the Mexican border. With over two-thirds of homicides attributed to firearms—weapons smuggling, particularly of assault rifles and military-grade weapons from the United States, this is a top concern for the Mexican government.

Collaborating on climate. In the summit the three countries pledged to reduce methane and black carbon emissions by 60–75% by 2030 and committed to conserving 30% of North American land and waters by 2030. All three countries are signatories of the Global Methane Pledge. In 2022, North America produced 20.9 million tons of methane, with both the United States and Mexico in the global top 10 highest emitters.

The Summit of North American Leaders resulted in a renewed commitment to North America cooperation, and a strengthened economic partnership with increased collaboration on economic, security and environmental issues. The outcomes of the summit will be implemented and revised in few months, ahead of other leaders' specific meetings scheduled before summer 2023 and split into several high level groups dialogue at trilateral level.

** Simone Lucatello is a Full-time Researcher at Instituto Mora, a public research centre based in Mexico City, Mexico. He holds a joint BA in History from the University of Venice Cá Foscari, Italy, and University College London (UCL), an MA in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a PhD in Governance for Sustainable Development from Venice International University (VIU), Italy.

Lucatello has worked as consultant to many United Nations agencies, including UNEP, UNODC, UNIC and OCHA, as well as the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). He is author of more than ten books and many articles published in English, Spanish, and Italian. He is an IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change) leading author for the Ar6 and coordinating author for the North American Chapter. His research interests deal with disaster relief, climate change, humanitarian action and sustainability in North and Latin America.