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Navigating the Waters of the Texas-Mexico Border: The Logistics of Operating Along an Asymmetrical Boundary

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Abstract:

Relationships along the border region of the United States and Mexico alternate between friendly and antagonistic. This is particularly true with regards to the vital, but scarce resource -- water. Droughts exacerbate the ambivalent relationship between the two nations but so too do the asymmetrical relationship that exists. While information exchanges between the two nations have improved, their footings are far from equal. The purpose of this paper is to examine the ways in which the asymmetry between the two nations poses barriers that must be addressed before a long-term, workable solution regarding their shared resources can be arrived. The requirement that Mexican truck drivers speak and read English before driving their trucks into the United States with no reciprocal requirement for U.S. truck drivers entering Mexico is one manifestation of the asymmetrical relationship that exists. Regarding environmental issues, decisions as to whether or not projects will be financed in pesos or dollars significantly impact their desirability and feasibility. That the dollar has generally prevailed keeps Mexico disadvantaged in these projects. Which sides of the border bi-national projects are to be located pose logistical sticking points as do which nation's law will prevail when resolving disputes. The sizeable personnel advantage that U.S. agencies have over their Mexican counterparts (for example, IBWC versus CILA) means that here too, Mexico is often disadvantaged in these negotiations. This asymmetry extends to more mundane decisions such as where bi-national conferences are to be hosted. U.S. hotel costs when translated into pesos prohibit attendance by Mexicans. Further, constant personnel changes within Mexican agencies have made forging long-term and trusting relationships with their U.S. counterparts difficult. The paper concludes with a comparison of the inequitable relationships within NAFTA and the more equitable features of the European Union and what such differences portend for the future.

Impact Statement:

This paper hopes to illuminate the complicated relationships that emerge when power and economic resources are significantly imbalanced. It is hoped that highlighting these imbalances will foster understanding that will facilitate building a lasting dialogue and mutual respect between the U.S. and Mexico that ultimately will result in a long-term, and equitable solution regarding their shared resources.

Category: Human Dimensions

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