PROLOGUE

 Throughout Contemporary History, security has been a controversial issue. In its broader geopolitical sense this term has sometimes been used to justify, or even cover up, overt expansionism or unilateral promotion of particular interests over the basic rules of international law. Hence the need to approach it cautiously, with special emphasis on the intrinsic right of each state to ensure its own security, as well as on the commitment of all to finding a balance between their national aspirations and their international obligations.

 This fact takes on special relevance in the post-Cold War era. The dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the resulting extinction of the bipolar system has led to an international scene that is much more tense and complex. We are living in a period of dynamic tension between contradictory forces—on one hand, the trend toward economic integration resulting from the process of globalization and, on the other, the trend toward political and social fragmentation, the result of a resurgence of exclusive nationalism, inter-ethnic conflict, and religious fundamentalism. More often than not, these inherent contradictions have exceeded the mechanisms which the international community has available for tackling challenges to global security.

 Therefore, each state has been faced with the imperative of thoroughly rethinking its view of national security, starting from the undeniable fact that domestic decision-making capability today contains an inevitable international component. No country can isolate itself from this reality, especially where geographic proximity is combined with economic interdependence.

 For Mexico, sovereignty is the most important value of its nationality, and its defence and strengthening is the primary aim of the state. One of the major aims of Mexican foreign policy, set forth in the National Development Plan 1995-2000, is precisely the strengthening of that country's ability to ensure its national security, along with active promotion of its interests through international cooperation and growing links with the centres of world economy. In this context, Canada is both an essential component of Mexico's strategy for diversifying its international relations and a factor of equilibrium in North America.

 After more than half a century of formal diplomatic relations, characterized by respect and cordiality, Mexico and Canada have met
again in a world in transition, full of challenges but also opportunities, in which both countries have more solid bases for rich and fruitful cooperation. To their traditional friendship are now added concrete shared interests that give greater consistency to their bilateral links.

From being distant and mutually unknown countries, we are today moving toward an authentic strategic alliance which, to yield the desired results, must be based on making the most of our similarities and complementarities while fully respecting national differences and individuality.

Belonging to the same geographic and economic space, being neighbours of the only global superpower, and growing identification in various areas of international policy are all factors that have strengthened communication and bilateral links in all spheres. Better knowledge of one another has also contributed to this relationship; we have learned to look at each other directly and no longer solely, as in the past, through the prism—sometimes opaque or distorting—of our powerful common neighbour.

Undoubtedly, the North American Free Trade Agreement was the initial impetus for this new stage of rapprochement. However, the emerging Mexican-Canadian strategic alliance goes far beyond trade. Our increasingly rich and diversified agenda takes in bilateral, trilateral, regional, and global issues. It is no exaggeration to say that in the past five years, of all Mexico's bilateral relations, those with Canada have experienced the greatest growth and dynamism.

The undeniable progress made in this process of linkage for the benefit of both nations calls for a redoubling of our efforts to consolidate and increase our ties. In addition to constancy and continuity in our endeavours, a forward-looking vision of our priorities is required. It was for this purpose that, at the last meeting of the Ministerial Committee, held in Ottawa in April 1995, the two governments undertook the drawing up of a Declaration of Principles and Objectives that will provide a framework and direction for our strategies and actions into the twenty-first century. In this task, as in many others, the active participation of diverse representatives of our societies—including the private sector, the academic community, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—is of the greatest importance.

While it is true that there are a large number of common goals to be achieved, there are still major differences in approaches and means, specifically, the very different views which the two countries have of
questions of international security, especially regarding the defence and promotion of democracy in the world.

This aim is an unalterable priority of Canada’s foreign policy. The Canadian government has maintained a position of stalwart support for all regional and world initiatives aimed at establishing mechanisms for the cooperative defence of democracy. Its committed action in United Nations peacekeeping operations is only one expression of this position. For its part, Mexico holds that the consolidation of democratic systems must be the ultimate result of internal processes which, though supported from outside, must first and foremost respond to and reflect the legitimate aspirations of each national society in the exercise of its right to self-determination.

However, it is important to recognize that differences in approach—some fundamental, others minor—are an integral and natural part of a partnership such as the one Mexicans and Canadians are building.

We will have to confront many complex challenges in the immediate future on the world stage and, particularly, within our own hemisphere. These challenges will demand active contributions from Mexico and Canada, both individually and in concert. Perhaps the most important are follow-ups to agreements resulting from the Summit of the Americas, held in Miami in December 1994, on the preservation and strengthening of democracy, the promotion of economic integration and free trade, the eradication of poverty and discrimination in the hemisphere, and sustainable development and the conservation of the environment.

Along the same lines is the project initiated by the United States to increase cooperation and information exchanges between armed forces on the continent. Because of their importance and implications, commitments resulting from the meeting of Defence Ministers of the Americas, held in July 1995 in Williamsburg, Virginia, also require in-depth analysis. Countries such as Mexico and Canada can make a valuable and constructive contribution to these initiatives.

Moreover, it is essential to decide if this ambitious process is to be carried out within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS), or whether—new institutional mechanisms for regional cooperation are to be established.

What is certain is that following the model that came out of Miami, political and economic integration, along with cooperation in
the military sphere, cannot and must not be the result of unilateral decisions or directives. The differences in political, economic, and social conditions between the countries of the region and the diversity of geostrategic conditions necessitate a broad process of consultation.

Ultimately, hemispheric security is the right and responsibility of all; it cannot be consolidated apart from the basic rules of international law. Neither the defence of democracy and the promotion of human rights, nor the fight against the greatest threat to the security of many states—drug trafficking with its train of crime, corruption, arms smuggling, and money laundering—justify actions that violate universally established principles, such as respect for sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, and self-determination of peoples. In short, hemispheric security is a common objective that requires the support of all countries in the region. It cannot be based on the view that the national interest of some states takes precedence over that of others.

In the new stage of linkage between Mexico and Canada, issues that were considered untouchable yesterday are today widely discussed by our governments and societies—further proof of the maturity that relations between our two countries have reached. Mutual trust and recognition will help consolidate our potential as "natural allies."

Therein lies the relevance and timeliness of the workshop on Canadian and Mexican perspectives on international security, organized jointly by the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM). This book is but one product of that forum, and it is my privilege to present it as a signal of our shared, and future, interests.

Jorge Castro-Valle K.