

Ten Easy Questions and Ten Tougher Ones Regarding the SPPNA (Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America)

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Summary: This fact sheet is intended to be a first introduction to the topic of the SPPNA (hereinafter SPP), initials of a very undemocratic alliance between Canada, Mexico and the United States. On August 21, 2007, the chief executives of Canada, Mexico and the United States met in Montebello, Quebec, to discuss the SPP. Showing total indifference for democracy, the three governments are reaching crucially important decisions with no prior consultation or consent of civil society. The summit received almost no press coverage in the US, but got reasonably good exposure in Mexico and Canada. We present herein reasons why the citizens of all three countries need to follow SPP developments.

1. What does SPPNA mean?

The initials stand for the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, a fairly new regional integration initiative that dates formally from March 23, 2005 when the presidents of Mexico and the United States, and the Canadian prime minister met in Waco, Texas.



2. Is the SPP related to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) that Presidents Carlos Salinas and Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed in 1993?

Yes, it is related and some analysts even call the SPP "NAFTA plus". But there are important differences.

One crucial difference is that the SPP is not an "agreement" as is NAFTA. If it were, it would be subject to scrutiny by the federal legislative branches in the three countries. But under the SPP, the chief executives are signing so-called regulations, hundreds of them, according to some reports. These are similar to presidential decrees and are therefore exempt from legislative review. Civil society has been given very little information about the content of these regulations or the process by which they are negotiated.

3. Why is it important that I know something about the SPP?



Citizens of all three countries are concerned because our democratic rights and sovereignty as nations are being surrendered to the US government and large corporations. At the behest, or insistence, of the Bush

administration, the governing elites of the other two countries have worked rapidly to "securitize" the region, which, at least in Mexico, has translated into increased militarization. The SPP is also part of the growing corporate takeover of activities and functions that used to lie in the public sector. Changes are being made in laws, norms, standards, regulations, practices, to facilitate international trade and so increase the profitability of certain corporations, but which in some cases weaken labor, consumer protection and environmental standards. Finding out about the SPP is a necessary first step in detaining its corrosive effects on democracy and national sovereignty.

4. Doesn't the SPP have to do with trade between our three countries?

Yes, it does, but it also goes far beyond trade issues. The Canadian citizens' organization *Common Frontiers* explains it as follows:

The SPP initiative is intended to harmonize many Canadian and Mexican domestic and foreign policies with those of the U.S. Under the guise of protecting citizens from the threat of terrorism and also facilitating trade, this initiative would involve drastic measures such as a deeper integration of North American energy markets, harmonized treatment of immigrants, refugees or tourists from abroad, and the creation of common security policies. (Press Bulletin, *Common Frontiers*, 27-Mar-06)

5. Why so much emphasis on security?

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the pretext for many changes is "security concerns" in the face of "world terrorism". In keeping with this mindset, US government strategists are quietly demanding that neighbors Mexico and Canada enact or reform laws and measures to increase security under US guidelines. The elites in both countries have happily and even eagerly acquiesced.



We believe that the SPP is also being implemented in anticipation of several phenomena.

One phenomenon, perhaps the most important, is the US's enormous appetite for energy resources. The access to abundant energy supplies and their control, preferably by US corporate giants, is perhaps the primary motive that explains US activities throughout the world, from imperial and illegitimate wars to the negotiation of unfair trade agreements and, now, the signing of regulations. The invasion of Iraq by US armed forces in 2003 is just the most recent example.

A second phenomenon is the global warming crisis and the increasing shortage of water that all Earth's inhabitants will soon face. In response to the planet's increasing thirst, the US is working to control and assure sufficient water from nearby sources, a fact that puts pressure on water supplies in southeast Mexico and throughout Canada. Canada's water in particular has been tabbed a US national security issue by the Bush administration.

Still a third phenomenon has to do with the trade war already being waged between the world's three main economic blocs. One of them is the European Union, the other is an Asian "bloc" headed by Japan and China, and the third bloc is essentially NAFTA. Each bloc is closing ranks with neighboring countries in different ways. We believe the US is positioning itself to control the Americas and the Caribbean in its trade wars with the other economic forces. The US wishes to control the continent's strategic natural resources to help guarantee mainly energy supplies (oil, natural gas and electricity),

but also access to other resources such as land, minerals and the region's enormous biodiversity (Brazil, Colombia, and Meso-America are extremely species rich).



Furthermore, the Americas are, or will soon be, a preferential market for US goods and services. The 34 countries of the Americas (all except Cuba) have a combined population of 800 million, 500 million of whom live outside the United States, and multinational corporations see the enormous potential of privileged access for their products in this region.

In addition to trade and natural resource issues,

Washington has since 2001 exercised greater control regarding the security and militarization of the Americas. When the military takes on a greater role in the internal affairs of any country, the result is a tendency towards the criminalization of social protest (a fact of life now in Mexico).

6. Who's behind the SPP?

Two main entities are pushing it forward. One is the US government, which considers the SPP to be an ideal initial step in a strategy of integrating the American continent in key areas under the pretext of "trade facilitation". It is true that the SPP does have aspects related to trade, but there are others that many times go unreported in the mass media, i.e., the ones mentioned above--access to energy resources, security, militarization. When the mass media report on the SPP they often mention only the trade aspects and gloss over other important topics.



Even the center-left press in the US falls into this trap. *The Nation* magazine reported that the SPP is a "relatively mundane formal bureaucratic dialogue" and accepted at face value Assistant Secretary of Commerce David Bohigian's claim that the SPP has to do with "simple stuff like, for instance, in the US we sell baby food in several different sizes; in Canada, it's just two different sizes". (*The Nation*, Aug. 27, 2007, www.thenation.com/doc/20070827/hayes).

The other actor pushing the SPP is the private sector, especially the large corporations that are eager to take advantage of the expansion of "free trade" and the access to natural resources that the SPP is promoting. In order to promote their trade interests within the SPP, corporate executives created the North American Competitiveness Council. The NACC is made up of 10 businessmen from each country (generally CEOs from major corporations), and its purpose is to make recommendations to government

leaders and officials, in order to secure maximum protection for their profits and interests. It is the only non-governmental body to have access and influence in SPP proceedings.

7. How is the control of natural resources to be ensured?



One way is through privatization. When a country's strategic resources are sold, corporations have an opportunity to buy and control what was once in the public domain. The corporations best poised to profit are from the US, but Canadian and some Mexican corporations will be winners too. As a general policy, the US government, either directly or through institutions it controls, e.g., the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund, has insisted for years on the privatization of state corporations. In Mexico these include the state oil company PEMEX and the Federal Electricity Commission, as well as water companies, health and educational institutions, etc. "Encouragement" by the US led to the privatization during the 80s and 90s of other strategic state sectors (the telephone company, airlines, trains, ports, and mass media, among others).

Another way is through treaties such as NAFTA and "partnerships" such as the SPP that severely restrict a country's sovereignty in matters of natural resource use. For example, as part of its 1989 free-trade agreement with the United States, Canada lost the right to reduce unilaterally its exports of oil to the US. Although Mexico did not formally agree to similar terms when it signed onto NAFTA, the Salinas, Zedillo, Fox and Calderón administrations have increased exports of oil when the US has so requested, for example, in the run up to the Iraq invasion. Guaranteed access by the US to Mexico's oil at bargain prices may be a matter that has been agreed to in the SPP regulations. Meanwhile, Mexico's oil supplies are quickly being depleted, with some estimates putting reserves at no greater than 15 years at current rates of extraction.

A more recent example has to do with increased levels of pesticides that Canadians will soon have in their foods, when tolerances for residues are "harmonized" to US standards by SPP regulations.

8. What implications does the SPP have for indigenous or first-nation peoples?

The SPP weakens the rights of first nations to inhabit and work their lands. In the case of Mexico, the country's governments (since the times of President Miguel de la Madrid, 1982 - 1988) have tried to weaken any "limitation" on private investment. The right of the



indigenous people to establish autonomous areas and decide on the use of natural resources located on their lands, recognized by the ILO's 169 Convention (see Article 15), is an aspect that the corporations would like to curtail. The same goes for laws and norms that have been established to protect the environment. We suspect that corporations are reaching agreements with governments within the SPP framework that first weaken and then eliminate these protections and rights. An important consequence of these changes is the intensification of indigenous communities' incentives to emigrate from their lands.

9. What is the most egregious aspect of this new Partnership?

Undoubtedly, it is the total contempt that the forces behind the SPP have for ordinary citizens and their right to decide on how a country is run. The SPP is profoundly undemocratic. Citizens' control is being weakened and turned over to a minority, e.g., a few people and corporations who are using greater doses of violence to accumulate capital. Basic principles are under threat: a country's wealth should be used to address and solve problems related to education, health, housing, infrastructure etc. The tendency now, however, as expressed in agreements such as the SPP, is the opposite: wealth is being concentrated in a few hands and the people are experiencing ever-greater poverty and deteriorating services and infrastructure, and are being forced to abandon their areas of origin in search for opportunities to make a decent living.

10. How does the SPP relate to the summits held between the presidents of Mexico and the United States and the prime minister of Canada?



Since the SPP began in 2005, the three chief executives have gathered several times. The last summit occurred on August 20 - 21, 2007, and featured talks between illegitimate presidents Calderón and Bush and Prime Minister Harper (all neo-cons) in the small town of Montebello, province of Québec. Little information on the summit surfaced in the US press (the *New York Times* dismissed the significance of the summit, see "No Breakthrough at Canada Talks", 22 Aug 2007, and "Bush's Talks with Neighbors Overshadowed by Storm", 21 Aug 2007). In the Mexican and Canadian press, and in activist circles, it was widely expected that the chief executives would sign additional SPP regulations.

Another tri-national summit is planned for April 21-22, 2008, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

11. How are these regulations drafted and approved?

In most cases the enforcement of regulations requires just the chief executives' signatures. It is actually corporate lawyers who draft the language of the regulations, especially those having to do with trade, in consultation with selected government officials and academics. This procedure overturns the traditional roles played by governments and corporations and in essence constitutes the privatization of what had traditionally been considered a public prerogative.

This is not a minor change. It bespeaks the growing corporate control of government, and the use of government to further corporate interests.

12. Do we have access to the documents signed by the executive branch?

No, SPP documents have not been released for public scrutiny. Civil society is not consulted before the signing ceremony nor is full disclosure practiced once the summits end.

We believe that the executives opted for signing regulations because, 14 years after NAFTA began in 1994, civil society throughout the region is better organized, informed, networked and mobilized. Further, first-hand experience with NAFTA has exposed the lies that were touted to sell the "virtues" of the trade agreement. For example, job creation has actually slowed in Mexico and NAFTA-induced job creation in the US and Canada has been modest at best; peoples' living standards have not risen; and the gap between Mexico and its more-developed neighbors in terms of salaries and per-capita income has actually widened. Within Mexico differences between the poorer states in the south and better-off states in the North have deepened.



If full disclosure existed, civil society would be ill disposed to accept a "deepening" of NAFTA such as the SPP. There might be large-scale mobilization and protests. Approval in the legislatures might not be forthcoming. The chief executives know this and in anticipation are signing decrees that circumvent watchdog functions by civil society and the legislatures.

13. The "security" aspect of the SPP is intriguing. Do our countries really have a security problem?

No, or at least not to the extent we've been told. We believe that any security concerns that may exist are the result of grossly misguided US foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East. In any event, the US and allied countries took advantage of the events that transpired on Sept. 11, 2001 and created an ambiance of fear in order to increase military budgets and repression.

Under the SPP, the three participating countries have agreed on a security apparatus that includes a greater control on flows of people and goods, response to threats such as terrorism, organized crime, the trafficking of people and the contraband of goods. All this implies greater coordination among intelligence services and greater repression to control "external and internal threats".



Evidently any social protest, for example, grassroots protests last year in Oaxaca or Atenco, Mexico, might be classified by the government as an "internal threat", or even "terrorism". In fact, the Attorney General of the state of Oaxaca declared that the APPO (Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca) is a "violent group" that has committed crimes "called terrorism" under the Federal Penal Code (La Jornada,

November 10, 2006, political section). Independent observers, such as the International Civil Commission for Human Rights Observation, have said the opposite, by copiously documenting the brutality of state repression against community-based or

non-partisan social movements

(see

http://cciodh.pangea.org/quinta/070120_inf_conclusiones_recomendaciones_eng.shtml.

Again, is there a security threat? Probably so... for the region's elites, who fear a backlash (or a "blowback" to use Chalmer Johnson's expression) from increasingly disgruntled populations.

14. What does this new Partnership have to do with prosperity?

Nothing. The word has been included for publicity purposes given worsening economic conditions for the majority of the region's population. The SPP will bring prosperity to the multinational corporations, their major shareholders and those in power who are colluding with the former.

Formally, there is a "prosperity agenda" that covers diverse subjects, such as easing restrictions on business, health measures, phytosanitary measures, financial services, electronic business, complicated rules of origin and many others. Large corporations have detected measures that are missing from NAFTA which would facilitate cross-border business and increase profits, at the expense of job creation and labor and environmental protections. These aspects are now being approved with SPP regulations.

The SPP omits reference to any social policies that might lead to greater prosperity of the majority of the population of the three participating countries.

15. Why is Mexico included in this type of partnership with two other countries with much large economies?

The motives have never been strictly economic. Not even with NAFTA. And now the security of the US has become a required reference point. US military strategists have placed increased priority on protecting the US's land borders by including Canada and Mexico as "buffer zones" in the event of "terrorist attacks". Mexico and Canada will be required to take measures, dictated by the US, to become as "secure" as the



US itself. In Canada the new orientation is well advanced. In Mexico it will take longer, but the objective is clear. Furthermore, under the SPP Mexico has become a "test-tube" nation, for experimentation in the context of future US plans for the region.

16. Mexico-an experiment? What for?

It seems likely that US plans go beyond integrating Mexico and Canada into its area of control and influence. We believe that the US wishes to control the Americas for the reasons mentioned in the response to question 5. As an example of US intentions, up to 2005, the US sought to extend "free trade" to the entire continent at a single go by means of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). The initiative backfired and was dropped when grassroots protests erupted throughout the Americas and left-leaning governments, opposed to US global interests, were elected in South America.

When the FTAA was derailed in 2005, the US took a slower approach in matters related to trade in the Americas. It continued making strides towards its goal of a "free trade Americas" by signing treaties with individual countries or with several countries

at a time in Central America. Mexico is just the first step in a much wider project that the US will be pushing forward in the next few decades for the integration of the entire American continent in matters of trade and other important issues that the US would like to see "bundled". In this sense Mexico's participation in the SPP is an experiment in how to integrate a developing country in an alliance with "developed" countries such as the US and Canada.



Let's explain further. The asymmetries separating Mexico and its northern neighbors are many. Mexico's deep and widening poverty and the reduced size of its economy vis-à-vis the US are obvious asymmetries, but there are other equally important, but less visible, differences that will undoubtedly be conflictive and will require resolution. For example, the difference in legal frameworks: Canada and the US operate under a legal system that derives from

Anglo-Saxon common law, while Mexico works with a tradition of Roman law inherited from Spain. Also, Mexican democracy is still in its birth pangs and there is an intense struggle by the majority of the population to win a greater voice in national affairs through the organization of independent, democratic, social movements.

As US strategists ponder how best to integrate the continent, it makes sense to grapple first with one country, and the obvious candidate is Mexico, in order to generate a series of experiences that will set a precedent when the rest of the continent and the Caribbean are incorporated. Analyzing the SPP back in 2005, Professor John Saxe-Fernández of Mexico's National Autonomous University wrote, "The goal is to use Mexico as a battering ram to push forward 'vertical integration' of Latin America to the [United States] in trade, finance, monetary and geopolitical aspects" (*La Jornada*, 28-Mar-05).

In Europe, the better-off countries had to make certain adjustments when poorer countries were integrated into the European Union. A certain standardization of procedures occurred. The better-off countries also disbursed enormous sums of money in an effort to "level the playing field" in education, health, housing, etc., and to solve the inevitable problems that were sure to arise, for example, retraining workers laid off from their jobs and creating a continent-wide labor market that would accommodate migration among European partners.

In contrast, the US wants a different type of integration. The US government wishes to give major corporations unfettered access to markets, while turning a blind eye to the social consequences of creating "modern, globalized economies" in its geostrategic neighborhood. The most immediate of these changes is the creation of an enormous "surplus labor army" as small businesses, which provide the largest share of jobs in the economy, fold when facing competition from the likes of Wal-Mart and Cargill. A responsible policy would provide funds or other opportunities to somewhat compensate the losers of globalization. There is absolutely no political support in the US for this type of foreign economic policy now, nor can we foresee a time when there will be. So integration will proceed by accords such as the SPP to be tested initially in Mexico. (Actually it is difficult to talk of "integration" per se, because the US will retain its hegemony in all crucial matters. Absorption might be a more appropriate term).

In a recent development, the US has drafted plans that call for transfers of up to a

billion dollars into Mexico. The funds are not for social programs and local economic development projects (which could provide alternatives to migration, the informal economy or crime), but for a supposed "war against drugs". This initiative parallels the rationale used to channel billions of dollars into Colombia, to increase that country's arsenal in its war against domestic insurgencies. (See "The Lost War", by Misha Glenny, *The Washington Post*, 19 August 2007).

This is a long-range task. We predict that the US will be pushing forward its corporate and security-led agenda through the SPP and its offshoots for the next several decades.

17. Does the SPP have anything to say about Mexican migration northward?

Except for references to "intelligent borders" that will make it easier and quicker for "low-risk persons" to cross border checkpoints, the SPP apparently overlooks migration issues. This mirrors the "NAFTA credo": goods, services, capital and high-level corporate executives can cross borders with increasing ease. Conversely, common folks, those that need to emigrate to survive because they cannot find work or a decent salary, are "high-risk persons" for the US government. Therefore they will continue to face difficulties as undocumented migrants, risking their lives by crossing deserts or mountains in search of a livelihood.

Free-trade policies, such as those promoted by NAFTA, have been an unmitigated disaster for the vast majority of Mexicans. The World Bank confirms that Mexico has expelled more of its people than any other country, including China and India, whose populations are 12 and 10 times greater than Mexico's.

The SPP contains no measures that recognize the dependence of the US and Canadian economies on Mexican immigrant labor and facilitate the transit of these workers. Thus a large and vulnerable labor pool will continue to exist, willing to accept low wages for risky jobs, depending on negligible labor rights, and eternally fearing abuse and deportation.

18. Is the increased militarization of Mexico's southern border part of these accords?



Undoubtedly, but today there is no region that is exempt from creeping militarization. Currently the southeast of Mexico has become a seal, especially for Central Americans, but also for other foreigners and even a few Mexicans. Mexico's ability to control its southern border is a crucial element within the SPP, but crackdowns on foreigners entering from Guatemala or Belize have had a poor record. Gross violations of human rights occur daily. All security forces

- the army, the National Migration Institute, the Federal Preventive Police, the Beta Force (established supposedly to "aid" immigrants in need), and the state police - have declared "open season" on Central Americas and treat them as spoils of war. With one hand they strip migrants of their belongings and receive bribes with the other hand from *polleros* (immigrant traffickers) so that their human cargo can continue their northward journey.

The SPP has, however, authorized a new type of border crossing. The United States now has permission to cross the Mexican or Canadian border with its armed forces

virtually at will. Incursions could take place during "red alerts" declared due to "terrorism" or suspicion of terrorism anywhere in the three-country region. (1)

These plans and accords are now quite well advanced between the US and Canada and we can reasonably suspect that similar agreements have been reached with Mexico.

The US and Canada have established a Binational Planning Group that has laid out "military contingency plans" to be enacted on both sides of the US-Canadian border and include "a coordinated response to national requests for military assistance [by civilian authorities we presume] in cases of a threat, attack or civil emergency in the US or Canada. Should a red alert be sounded, these so-called 'requests' could lead to the deployment of US troops or Special Forces in Canadian territory" [information taken from globalresearch.ca].

19. Has there been any opposition to the SPP?

Definitely. As people and organizations find out about the SPP, a common reaction is to ask how can we work together with others to expose and oppose it. Fortunately, there are organizations and networks that are undertaking diverse activities, such as information dissemination, mobilization and protest against the SPP.

In Mexico, CIEPAC (Center for Economic and Political Investigation for Community Action, www.ciepac.org), and the RMAC (Mexican Action Network on Free Trade, www.rmalc.org.mx), actively disseminate information on the SPP.

In the United States, ART (Alliance for Responsible Trade, www.art-us.org) is a good place to look for information. Global Exchange is also disseminating information on the effects of neoliberal policies such as NAFTA and neocolonial schemes such as the SPP, www.globalexchange.org.

In Canada, Common Frontiers, www.commonfrontiers.ca and the RQIC (Quebec Network on Continental Integration, www.rqic.alternatives.ca), have excellent information, as does the Council of Canadians, www.canadians.org.

Other allies in this struggle throughout the Americas have created a region-wide network know as the HSA or Hemispheric Social Alliance (<http://asc-hsa.org>).

20. What can we do to protest the SPP?

As always, the first step involves finding out about the SPP. All social organizations, trade unions, producers' cooperatives, etc. should undertake information



dissemination campaigns on the SPP, in order to widen awareness of what it means, how it will (and is) affecting us and how to work for better alternatives based on peoples' needs.

After finding out more, we ought to put our greater awareness into action: teach, organize, protest, struggle, demonstrate and mobilize against the terrible effects of the SPP.

But becoming a full-time activist is just one option. Many folks, despite how much they would like to do just that, have fears or other obligations that keep them from dedicating the time and energy needed to join an activist organization. But they can still do something, for example, talking with family members, friends, neighbors, fellow community members or colleagues, or holding informative events, even just a conversation about the SPP, or passing along a relevant video. If you have finished reading this booklet, don't put it aside, pass it on to your family and friends! Each of us can do something, however small it may be, to help inform others about the SPP. And how the SPP fits into a greater (capitalist) scheme of things.

Why should these important agreements be taken without complete transparency? Why is it that a small group of elites and large corporations find it necessary to hide SPP proceedings from public view? It is up to us to ensure that our countries represent our interests, the majority's interests.

For further reading, please see:

"*Behind Closed Doors: What they're not telling us about the SPPNA*", by the Council of Canadians, canadians.org/integratethis/backgrounders/guide

"*Divergent U.S. Critiques of the Security and Prosperity Partnership: From Anti-Immigrant to Pro-Democracy Perspectives*", Manuel Pérez Rocha, September 2007, www.art-us.org/node/288

For a historic overview of the SPP, please see:

"*NAFTA-plus: the future according to the elites*", part 1

www.ciepac.org/boletines/chiapas_en.php?id=470

and "*NAFTA-plus: the future according to the elites*", part 2

www.ciepac.org/boletines/chiapas_en.php?id=471

DECLARATION OF PARTICIPANTS IN A REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE SPP

www.ciepac.org/documento.php?id=92

updated February 1, 2008

Notes

1. See, for example, Michel Chossudovsky's article, "Is the Annexation of Canada part of Bush's Military Agenda?", www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=174.

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