

What About Us

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The general tone is one of catastrophe: the world changed and no one is going to be able to save it. The Trump victory may not have been desirable, but it certainly was probable. The manner in which the government and many opinionators have reacted suggest that “the end is near”, but that need not be so. The atmosphere reminds me of one of the passages from *War and Peace*: “The strongest of all warriors”, Field Marshal Kutuzov explains, are these two: Time and Patience.” With Napoleon’s army advancing, Kutuzov wisely wanted to wait for reinforcements before engaging in battle. When Russian generals demanded that Kutuzov attack Napoleon at his strongest, the field marshal replied, “When in doubt, do nothing.”

The election of Trump as the president of the world’s superpower and our main trade partner does not furnish us with many options but it obliges us to contemplate, with a cool head, the implications and opportunities that this entails. At this time it is impossible to know what Trump will actually do, but we already know that he will submit NAFTA to an evaluation at the Interstate Trade Commission -an agency with serious analytical capabilities- with an economic, labor and geopolitical mandate, in other words, seriously. Obviously, no one knows what will happen once the government is duly integrated, but nothing is accomplished by speculating. What is certain is that Trump brings with him an enormous sea change, but, once he is functioning in office, the reality of the power and of the institutional structures will sink in and make him recognize that there are limits to his agenda. What is crucial is to work to attempt to remove our issues from the line of fire, something not easy, but not impossible either.

If one reads his “Contract with America,” a pamphlet that was prepared for his campaign, there are no limits to the risks that we are confronting; however, if one analyzes the realities of power and of geopolitics, the options that the new president will face are very distinct from the agenda that he proposed when he faced no restrictions. One thing is the rhetoric and another is the reality, which does not mean moderation.

Everything indicates that our greatest risk (that Trump might sign a letter annulling NAFTA upon arriving at the White House, a possibility foreseen in Article 2205 of the agreement) has diminished. The assessment by the ITC will be the centerpiece of the process. While that’s settled, the government should maintain -actually, accomplish- unity and discipline of message and clarity of objectives. It also must understand better the panorama of the new team as it takes shape in order to identify opportunities but also to develop strategies that show Mexico’s strengths and chips -which are not few- in this relationship. Managing the political process will be crucial. Of course, we could and should aspire to a much more profound understanding of the immense complexity, diversity and two way benefits inherent to the bilateral relationship –the

benefits that both of us derive from this in matters of security, stability and economic development-, but first things first and that is that NAFTA is the *only* engine of the Mexican economy.

The government can congratulate itself about its foresight (the invitation to today's President-Elect), but the reality is that this does not change by any means the disaster and the vulnerability under which the country was placed with an economic and fiscal policy of the seventies that is unsustainable in the globalization era and, maybe, even with the invitation itself.

The second stage will begin, at least formally, as soon as the new government begins to function. That is where will be able to see tensions on various fronts; first, between the two governments due to incompatibility of views, perspectives and objectives. The government might have saved itself from the "punishment" that Clinton probably had planned in the form of a merciless attack in matters of human rights and corruption, but there will indeed come a clash of visions for which Mexico certainly is not prepared. The point is not who is right, but who possesses the capacity to impose an agenda. The key during these months will be to "educate" the new government concerning the importance of the relationship, a principle that includes making them realize, in practice, that they too benefit from the relationship, that it is equitable and that they need Mexico's cooperation.

However, Mexico's image in the U.S. will not change until reality changes. Trump took advantage of Mexico because that something easy for his potential voters to understand: that our way of acting -corruption, impunity, bad government, bureaucracy and systematic abuse- are what is visible about Mexico. It does not matter whether that photo is fair or not, what is important is that it is real. Until we do not change our reality, that will be the image that remains in the mind of our neighbors: Trump did not invent the image; he just took advantage of it.

The government has two options: one is to bring itself up to accept the new reality and act consequently; the other would be to let someone else do it because the nation cannot wait.

Cantinflas understood this moment better than anyone: "The most interesting thing in life is its being simultaneous and successive, at the same time." The question is whether this government has that capacity.

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