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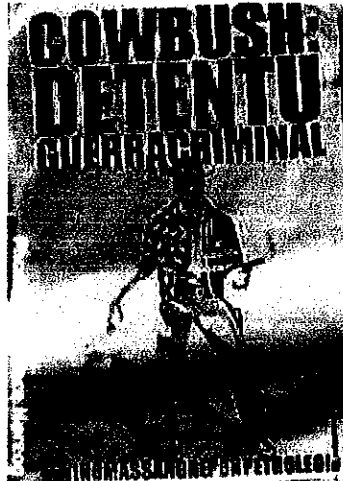
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What effect is the U.S. war with Iraq having on U.S.-Mexican relations?

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A New Border Between the United States ar Mexico?

By [Lawrence Herzog](#) | Saturday, April 05, 2003

A new border is emerging between the United States and Mexico — the border between war and peace. Even though Mexico is arguably the country that is mc economically and politically dependent o the United States, Mexicans have their ov ideas about the U.S.-led war in Iraq. Lawrence Herzog — our "Borderlines" columnist — reports on how it feels wher one crosses the border.

To the north, America is at war. CNN and orange alerts rule the day.

Peace south of the border

Images of tanks, armored vehicles on swaths of desert, bombed-out Baghdad streets or wounded soldiers in a strange land have become everyday stuff.

In Mexico, prominent writers are celebrated for their anti-war positions. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and others speak in front of large crowds.

In fact, they have taken their place alongside the daily commute, soccer moms in SUVs and chats across bar stools in the local pub.

But just south of the border, in Mexico, a stunningly different scene unfolds. A palpable sense of normalcy, peace and serenity reigns.

The nation seems unified — there is a new solidarity. Mexico is against the war. Mexico is quiet. Mexico feels safe.

A different atmosphere



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At the Tijuana border, I met Elizabeth Santillanez, who lives in the United States and manages a U.S.-Mexico border health program at the University of California, San Diego. She says that she recently drove to a meeting in Tijuana and experienced the different atmospheres on either side of the border.

"As soon as I crossed the border into Tijuana, I felt this sense of relief, of relaxation. It was as if I had left a war zone," Ms. Santillanez commented.

Celebrating opposition

In Mexico City, for weeks now, streets and plazas have overflowed with people expressing the peaceful mood of the nation, so contrary to their northern neighbor.

Large signs referring to city neighborhoods are proudly draped across the main plazas: "Coyoacan says no to war" or "Colonia Roma against the war." On buses, in supermarkets, in airports, Mexicans speak openly about their opposition to the U.S. Invasion of Iraq.

Land of the free?

In the United States, writers and Nobel prize winners have been seen handcuffed and thrown in jail for protesting the war in public parks or on streets. Mairead Corrigan Maguire, who won the 1976 Nobel prize for her peace work in Northern Ireland, and Jody Williams, who received the 1997 Nobel prize for her work to eradicate land mines, were both arrested in a peaceful protest outside the White House.

In contrast, in Mexico, prominent Latin American writers are celebrated for their anti-war positions. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes and others speak in front of large crowds.

At a book signing in the landmark House of Tiles building in Mexico City's historic center, Carlos Fuentes told hundreds of admirers that the Bush

Administration is "...a bewitched, demonized, out of control government, much like the Hitler regime was in its time. We don't know how far they will go because they act on their own will, without reason, without listening to the rest of the world."

In the San Diego Union Tribune newspaper, a reader wrote: "While we're tossing out all of our French fries and perfume, why are we so hush-hush about our amigos to the south?"

Tight-lipped

In the United States, photographs of President Bush reveal a tight-lipped, tough-talking man determined to cut Saddam Hussein down to size.

In Mexico, President Fox appears on TV as friendly, relaxed — and firmly behind his country's pursuit of peace. The front page of the respected, conservative business newspaper El Financiero recently displayed a photo of a smiling Fox, with the caption "Love and peace."

Mexican media gets it right

In the United States, war reporting in the media is restricted by the Pentagon. Television stations are barred from running a videotape of captured U.S. prisoners being held in Iraq.

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Not so in Mexico. One father of a U.S. Marine POW says he did not find out about his daughter's status until he saw her picture by accident on the Mexican news program "Telemundo."

In the United States, anti-war commentators are angrily labeled unpatriotic. The ire over documentary filmmaker Michael Moore's anti-Bush speech at Oscars has still not dissipated.

Patriotism or criticism?

In Mexico, walk past any kiosk — and the anti-war headlines of newspapers scream out at you: "Genocide in Iraq." "Prolonged War, More Civilian Deaths." Or:

"In One Week, 4,000 Bombs in Iraq." "Smart Bombs Devastate Neighborhood in Baghdad, Twenty Dead." "How Can Bush Massacre the Community He Says He Wants to Liberate?"

Taking on the northern colossus

Mexican opinion essays have been scathing. La Jornada, the liberal Mexico City newspaper has taken it to President Bush in an uncharming manner. His new nickname is "WC" — the "W" of his middle name attached to "C", thus becoming a reference to "water closet," or bathroom.

One writer, in an essay titled "The War That Bush Has Already Lost," states that "...this war is death, holocaust, destruction. But it is also a war that questions western values."

But the author does not leave it there: "George W. Bush is not even the chief executive chosen by the national electorate. He is a product of an electoral fraud, surely choreographed, no more, no less, by his own brother, Jeb Bush, the governor of Florida."

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The next France?

Such words are not lost on citizens north of the border. In a letter to the editor titled "Why bash France, but not Mexico" in the San Diego Union Tribune newspaper, a reader writes:

"While we're tossing out all of our French fries and perfume, why are we so hush-hush about our amigos to the south? Where's the outrage about our closest and most dependent neighbor, Mexico, snubbing our efforts? I will be sitting it out on Cinco de Mayo."

Spicing up the relationship?

Incidentally, Cinco de Mayo is the celebration of Mexico's victory on May 5, 1862 over Napoleon III's army at Puebla, Mexico — and it is celebrated more in the United States than in Mexico. Many Americans erroneously think it is Mexican independence day (which is actually 16 September).

As the rift over Iraq policy grows wider, one has to wonder: Are we witnessing the beginning of yet another era of new walls — and higher fences — between Mexico and the United States?

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