

SPECIAL REPORT

SECURING NORTH AMERICA'S FUTURE

BY



U.S. - MEXICO
FOUNDATION



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Business Council
of Canada



NORTH CAPITAL
MERIDIAN DIPLOMACY
FORUM APRIL 23 • 2025
WASHINGTON, DC

Introduction

On April 23, 2025, the inaugural *North Capital Meridian Diplomacy Forum* convened a dynamic and diverse network of leaders at the Meridian International Center in Washington, DC. Born from the strategic merger of the *North Capital Forum* and the *Meridian Diplomacy Forum*, this invitation-only gathering—co-hosted by the U.S.-Mexico Foundation and Meridian International Center—marked a milestone in trilateral dialogue across North America.

Set against the backdrop of shifting political landscapes and an approaching USMCA review, the forum offered a timely platform for addressing the region's most pressing challenges. From economic and food security to labor mobility, supply chain resilience, cybersecurity, and trade policy, the day's agenda prioritized both urgent concerns and long-term opportunities for collaboration.

This white paper captures key insights from the forum's discussions—offering a roadmap for stakeholders committed to advancing a more integrated, secure, and prosperous North American region. As this critical dialogue continues, the ideas and relationships forged represent a foundation for shared leadership and regional innovation in the years ahead.

A special thank you to our sponsors:



A low-angle photograph of a series of tall, silver flagpoles arranged in a diagonal line from the bottom left towards the top right. Each pole holds a different national flag, including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and others. The flags are waving in the wind against a clear, pale blue sky. The text "DIPLOMACY AND SECURITY" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters in the upper-middle portion of the image.

DIPLOMACY AND SECURITY

Scoring Big: The 2026 World Cup and North America's Soft Power Strategy

Affiliate: Meridian International Center

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is more than a sporting event—it's a defining opportunity for North America to demonstrate unity, innovation, and global leadership. With 16 host cities across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, and a projected \$40 billion economic impact in the U.S. alone, the 2026 tournament can serve as a catalyst for economic growth, public diplomacy, and regional cooperation across North America. Much more than just the matches on the pitch, the legacy of the World Cup should extend beyond the final whistle—delivering long-term benefits in diplomacy, infrastructure, and regional identity.

Recommendations

Establish a Trilateral Travel and Tourism Facilitation Program

With visa delays posing a significant challenge, the governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico should create a streamlined travel program—or a regional visa waiver initiative—to expedite entry for fans, athletes, and staff. This initiative could also serve as a model for

future regional events and strengthen long-term mobility within North America.

Launch a Joint Cultural Diplomacy Campaign

To reinforce soft power and foster public goodwill, the three nations should co-create cultural festivals, public art installations, and joint ceremonies that celebrate shared values and diversity across borders. These activities should begin well before 2026 to build excitement and promote mutual understanding.

Develop a North American Sports Legacy Strategy

Policymakers and private sector leaders should collaborate on a legacy plan that prioritizes investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and digital connectivity. Such a strategy would help ensure the World Cup delivers lasting benefits—particularly for underserved communities—and supports future international initiatives, including the proposed 2031 Women's World Cup co-hosting bid.



Expand Regional Engagement Beyond Host Cities

To ensure the World Cup resonates across all corners of the U.S., Mexico, and Canada—not just in the 16 host cities—governments and organizers should invest in fan fests, mobile cultural exhibits, and community watch events in secondary markets and rural areas. This approach would democratize access to the World Cup experience, foster national unity, and amplify the tournament's soft power impact by engaging millions who may not be able to attend games in person.

Securing North America: Strengthening Cooperation & Regional Trust



Affiliate: Convocation

While trade integration across North America has advanced steadily since the days of NAFTA, security cooperation has not evolved at the same pace. Security dynamics remain shaped by outdated frameworks, fragmented approaches, and divergent national priorities. Trust among the three countries has deteriorated, compounded by domestic political tensions and the politicization of issues like migration, fentanyl trafficking, and tariffs. The momentum to create a North American security perimeter, first envisioned after 9/11, has been lost, and today there is little serious interest in reviving it. Political sensitivities remain an obstacle to deeper trilateral security cooperation, and despite operational ties at the subnational level, the erosion of trust at the national level may impact the breadth of security cooperation. As threats are proliferating from the cybersecurity domain to transnational organized crime, a shared security vision anchored in mutual awareness, preclearance intelligence, and structural modernization is essential.

Recommendations

Modernize and expand security cooperation

The region suffers from a lack of codified

trilateral security cooperation, and existing bilateral agreements require modernization. Efforts should be undertaken to identify specific security areas where joint undertakings can yield tangible benefits, such as intelligence sharing and best practices in addressing transnational crime. The U.S. and Mexico should also strive to reset their security cooperation, recognizing that even imperfect frameworks like the Mérida Initiative provided a necessary structure in the interim.

Shared customs cooperation

Customs is a strategically vital area where two major challenges confronting North America converge: China's trade practices and the fentanyl crisis. Countries should undertake a feasibility study and initiate pilot programs for enhanced customs cooperation, potentially leading to a binational US-Mexico agency as a first step, with the long-term goal of a trilateral integration. It is also important to expand joint law enforcement, environmental, and infrastructure projects (e.g., NEXUS, Gordie Howe International Bridge) as platforms for broader coordination. Such efforts would help tackle converging challenges like fentanyl trafficking, trade vulnerabilities, and customs management.

Sino Shadow: Strategic Responses in Trade & Security to China

Affiliate: Peterson Institute for International Economics

Across North America, there is growing recognition of the profound impact China exerts across critical industries such as biopharmaceuticals, aerospace, and artificial intelligence. China's state-driven model—leveraging foreign direct investment, industrial overcapacity, non-market practices, and espionage—poses serious challenges to North American competitiveness and security.

Recommendations

Utilize the USMCA to Strengthen Regional Economic Cooperation

Countering China's growing economic dominance requires the U.S., Mexico, and Canada to present a unified economic agenda and align priorities at the 2026 USMCA Review. Rather than focusing solely on restricting China, North America should prioritize building its own regional industrial capabilities. This includes addressing shortfalls in domestic production of essential components such as printed circuit boards and critical minerals vital to advanced manufacturing. While full economic decoupling is currently unrealistic; clearer safeguards, transparency mechanisms, and national security reviews must be established to monitor and regulate Chinese influence without sacrificing North America's economic stability.

Engage the Private Sector More Directly in National Security Efforts

Countering China's growing presence, especially in vulnerable regions like Latin America and the Caribbean, requires both military and private sector engagement. In small countries without standing militaries, U.S. security support remains vital but is being outpaced by China's growing collaborations and investments in the region, making it the "country of necessity" rather than the partner of choice. While government action is necessary



to prompt further military support to counter China, national security can no longer be left solely to governments; the private sector and NGOs must play a leading role in building resilience, investing in and shaping partnerships, and promoting North American values abroad. To support this, North America should incentivize strategic private investment, tapping into the growing momentum around "patriotic capital" to meet national security and economic competitiveness objectives.

Improve Data Collection and Transparency on Chinese Investment

Robust data collection is critical to developing coordinated, evidence-based responses to China's expanding economic footprint in North America. For instance, the number of Chinese companies operating in Mexico has nearly doubled since 2017, yet official data often fail to capture the full picture—particularly when investments are routed through third countries like the U.S. Without clear, accurate tracking of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI), North America cannot effectively assess vulnerabilities or seize opportunities.

About the North Capital Meridian Diplomacy Forum

The North Capital Meridian Diplomacy Forum, a collaboration between the US-Mexico Foundation and Meridian International Center, merges the North Capital Forum and the Meridian Diplomacy Forum into a single, invitation-only event.

With shifting priorities across North America, diplomats, business leaders, and policymakers tackle actionable solutions for regional security, inspire innovation, and ensure North America's long-term success in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

About US-Mexico Foundation

The U.S. Mexico Foundation (USMF) is a binational non-profit, non-partisan, organization dedicated to fostering cooperation and bilateral understanding between the United States and Mexico. Rooted in the North America Free Trade Agreement, the organization was founded in 2001 and began operations in 2004 with seed capital from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Carnegie Corporation and FUNDEMEX. The USMF is governed by a binational board consisting of business and civic leaders, with extensive networks in the U.S. and Mexico. The USMF embarked on a new chapter in 2018, with a compelling agenda that prioritizes policy and advocacy. The organization is focused on creating new strategic alliances, educating important stakeholders, and providing a voice on the most relevant issues concerning the U.S.-Mexico relationship.

About Meridian International Center

Meridian is a nonpartisan center for diplomacy founded in 1960 and headquartered on a historic campus in Washington, DC. Our mission is to empower the next era of leaders to advance diplomacy for a better future. Our programs strengthen American leadership by accelerating collaboration on shared challenges, increasing economic competitiveness, and building geopolitical resilience. We equip leaders from business, science and technology, cities and states, culture and sports with insights, networks, and resources to navigate a complex world.

Acknowledgements

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Special Thanks: Enrique Perret, Ambassador Stuart Holliday, Paola Bertran, Julia Muzquiz, and Matthew Stefanski

Photography: Tom Duppa and Jess Latos