

May 30, 2012

To: Katonah Great Decisions Participants

From: Fred Piker – Discussion Leader

Re: Summary of 5/15/12 Meeting – “Mexico and Its Relationships With the U. S. and Central America” – Topic Leaders: Joe Adams & Maureen/John Carpenter

**10:15: KICKOFF**

Welcome and Introduction of Guests & New Chapter Members

Peter Kuniholm, a guest at our 5/1 meeting, has decided to join our Chapter.

Future 2012 and early 2013 Day Time Meeting Dates

9/18, 10/2, 11/6, 12/4, and 1/8/13

Future Schedule of 2012/Early 2013 Spring Daytime Meeting Topics

**Although most of us shift our priorities over the summer, thinking ahead toward our first three fall meetings, here are some suggestions for you to consider:**

- (1) For our 9/18 meeting, Howard Goldfrach suggested we should discuss, “Following the November election, what changes might be forthcoming in U. S. foreign policy?” My inclination now is that we could discuss that issue during the 9/18 “Current Events Module.”**
- (2) To prepare for our 10/2 discussion, over the summer suggest you read the two books – “Strategic Vision” & “The World America Made.” Although it is likely both books are available from the library, they are also available via Amazon.**
- (3) In preparation for the 11/6 discussion re China, I call to your attention the current issue of the Economist which has an excellent article re the PRC economy.**

9/18 – Panel Discussion – “The Role of Foreign Policy” – Panelists:  
Fred Piker & Other Chapter Colleagues

10/2 – Discussion re “Strategic Vision” (Brzezinski) & “The World America

Made” (Kagan) – Topic Leaders: Tyler Beebe & Howard Jacobs

11/6 – “China and Its New Leadership” – Topic Leader: Charlie Kimball

12/4 – “Turkey” – Topic Leader: TBA

1/8/13 – “Climate Change” – Topic Leader: Ken Krieger

Backup Topics – “Impacts of an Aging Population” and “Impacts of New Communications Media”

### Issues for Current Events Module

Due to the Chapter luncheon, we did not have this module on 5/15. It will resume in Fall 2012.

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### **GROUP DISCUSSION**

*CHAPTER MOTTO - “DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT FONDNESS FOR DISPUTE OR DESIRE FOR VICTORY” – BEN FRANKLIN*

### **Readings & References – Pre-Meeting Preparation**

**To ensure an informed discussion, participants are encouraged to review the “Priority” readings and time permitting, “Supplementary” readings as well.**

#### **Priority**

FPA 2012 Briefing Book – “Mexico: Transborder Crime and Governance”

FPA Website – [www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org) – go to “Great Decisions” – then to “Resource Library” – then to “Mexico” and also “Central America” – you will find several readings

CIA – The World Factbook: Mexico (last updated 4/13/12) - can be accessed online

BBC News – Mexico Country Profile (last updated 1/19/12) – can be accessed online

#### **Supplementary**

FPA 2012 Briefing Book – page 18

“The World America Made” – Author: Robert Kagan

“The Post American World – Author: Fareed Zakaria

“Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power” – Author: Zbigniew Brzezinski

NYT – 5/6/12 – “A U. S. Drug War Inside Honduras, Waged Iraq-Style”

### **Topic Introduction**

Initially Maureen, John, and Joe provided an overview of U. S. foreign policy toward Latin America and Mexico and Central America in particular. The overview included discussion of current Mexican politics, the upcoming Presidential election, immigration (to the U. S. from its southern neighbors, and to Mexico from its southern neighbors), drug and gun trafficking, regional trade, and other topical issues. Following a viewing of the related FPA DVD segment, they led discussion re the questions listed below.

### **Preliminary Discussion Questions**

**LISTED BELOW ARE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MAUREEN, JOHN & JOE. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SOME OVERLAP WITH THE FPA QUESTIONS LISTED ON PAGE 44 OF THE 2012 FPA BRIEFING BOOK**

1 –Mexico faces a choice in its upcoming election: continue the direct military confrontation of the drug cartels, or return to the pre-Calderon practice of tacit agreements in exchange for a reduction in violence. Which is more important – security or sovereignty? What are the potential benefits to reducing military confrontation in the “drug war.” Could there be a return to normalcy after six years of conflict?

2-What social, economic and political factors have contributed to the rise of the drug cartels and the development of international drug routes? How should U. S. policymakers respond to these concerns? Are existing U. S. initiatives, such as the use of drones, the Merida initiative, or the “Fast and Furious” weapons project, appropriate? Is development aid an effective response?

3-Do you agree with the author’s assessment that the U. S. has limited capacity to effect political change in Mexican or Central American domestic policies? If the author is correct that the labeling of Mexico as a democracy is flawed, how should U. S. foreign policy toward the region be calibrated?

4-Mexican domestic pressure on cartels has, in some cases, pushed them south into Central America. What are the obligations of countries to ensure that security problems are not exported to neighboring states? To what extent does the U. S. bear a responsibility for violence within Mexico’s borders, or Mexico for increased insecurity in the Central American isthmus?

5-What are the foreign policy implications associated with illegal immigration to the U. S. from Mexico and Central America and also drug trafficking? How do you assess the U. S. response to these issues? What further steps should the U. S. take? Has the U. S. preoccupation with the Middle East and its recent pivot toward Asia eroded its ties to our southern neighbors?

6-What role and potential contribution could Mexico and Central America play in helping the U. S. combat world-wide terrorism and also address the rising power and influence of China?

**Participant Observations**

George Roy's notes re the discussion follow in a separate e-mail

**12:00 P. M-ADJOURNMENT**

**12:30 P. M. – SOCIAL LUNCHEON AT LE FONTANE RESTAURANT**

13 colleagues joined for lunch.

Hope you have a fun summer Look forward to seeing you again on 9/18..

Best regards,