

## Letter From Mexico

by V. Groginsky

### Open Roads to Nowhere



SLOW TRAFFIC RIGHT LANE. It is a simple concept if you are literate and socially conscious. Consideration for others, however—the idea that you are not alone in the world and that it does not belong exclusively to you—is not an inborn value, but one taught by family and society. The realization that, while we may have our own way of living and path to follow, others have theirs and we must not cause hindrance or obstruct forward progress, is cultural in origin, and neither instinctual nor universal.

In a perfect hemisphere, all would share an harmonious ideal of traveling across the continent in security and ease, a river of goods and services. While we are not flying on magic carpets, we do have social norms and customs that allow for an orderly movement of people and products. And, indeed, the Open Roads provision of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would have us believe that such is the case throughout the Western Hemisphere. But only someone who has never driven in Mexico could fall for such a fantasy.

Imagine a country where might makes right, a nation not of law and order but of the institutionalized abuse of power throughout society, where law-enforcement officials are part of almost every known band of professional kidnapers, and police commit armed robberies, killing their own colleagues in the line of duty; where those involved in kidnapping, drug trafficking, murder, rape, carjacking, and road piracy are rarely caught or prosecuted and, if sent to prison, can buy their freedom with relative ease and at a low price. Imagine a place where there are few rules of the road (which are not respected when they do exist), where semi-trailers (even two- or three-carriages long) do not employ lane-change signals, run automobiles off the road with impunity, and drive 20 m.p.h. on a 70-m.p.h. highway—side by side with another semi, blocking all traffic for miles. Imagine a

system where few motorists use mirrors or shoulder checks to verify if it is clear to enter traffic. Imagine a society where there is no individual responsibility or accountability, where those involved in auto accidents can simply walk away from the smoldering wrecks (at least, those who survive). *Bienvenidos a Mexico.*

In Mexico, liability is virtually nonexistent—hence the popular refrain: *No importa quien tiene la culpa, sino, quien tiene.* (“It doesn’t matter who’s at fault; what matters is who has money to be had.”) And, if defensive driving is the aspiration of driver’s education in the United States, the lack of comparable training in Mexico—as well as the Mexican penchant for petty vendettas for anything as small as passing someone on the highway—creates a lethal combination of aggressive and reckless behavior on the road.

Perhaps no other issue arising from NAFTA has been so controversial as that of international transit for commercial vehicles.

George W. Bush and other proponents of Open Roads talk idealistically about the efficiency and freedom of Mexican and U.S. trucks crossing the border to deliver goods. Now, thanks to expanded free markets and modernization, there need be no more bureaucratic or traffic tie-ups on the border, which used to occur when containers had to be switched to a transit vehicle and then loaded onto national carriers on the other side of the border. Minor details of road safety, law enforcement, and environmental and economic consequences are all simply brushed away.

Others, such as the Teamsters, the California Trucking Association, the California Labor Federation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Planning and Conservation League, have lobbied against the provision, citing a host of safety, economic, and environmental issues. (The Teamsters in particular have lobbied hard, while their critics have accused them of merely fearing the loss of American trucking jobs to illegal Mexican competitors who would work unregulated and for a fraction of the wages of their American counterparts.)

Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen has also strongly opposed the provisions, citing unreasonable dangers on U.S. roads from Mexican trucks:

Texas border communities within the commercial border zone in which Mexican trucks are permitted have seen a dramatic increase in highway fatalities and serious injuries from crashes involving trucks with Mexican registrations . . .

Even the *Los Angeles Times*, on August 26, 2002, came out against Open Roads:

Caving in to diplomatic pressure, the Bush administration has chosen to simply [*sic*] ignore American environmental laws. Bush is compromising public health in the process . . . there are ways to satisfy the requirements of NAFTA other than by simply throwing open our borders. Mexico’s fleet of tractor trailers is much older—and dirtier—than that in the U.S. Before 1993, truck engines in Mexico were unregulated. Even engines manufactured more recently don’t begin to meet environmental standards . . . for U.S. engines. Yet, in deciding to open the border, the administration declined to consider the environmental impacts of these diesel-spewing behemoths . . . Mexican trucks on average generate 150% more smog-forming nitrogen oxide and 200% more dangerous particulate matter than U.S. trucks . . . California already has some of the most polluted, unhealthy air in the nation, the cause of respiratory disease and premature death . . . The proposed presidential action once again raises a question central to the NAFTA debate: Must increased free trade come at the expense of American environmental standards and the public health? The short answer is no. . . . The trade agreement with Mexico requires us to allow Mexican trucks access to U.S. roads, but that doesn’t mean we have to exempt the trucks from all U.S. laws.

The enforcement of national and state transport laws—as well as NAFTA regulations—remains a problem unresolved by state and federal governments. In essence, a two-tier system exists, discriminating against U.S.-based carriers: As

Tod Spencer of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA) testified at a joint U.S. Senate Committee hearing,

There is no single enforcement official in the United States who can stop a Mexican truck and determine whether a foreign trucker has a valid commercial driver's license, determine whether the trucker has valid insurance, determine whether the truck is safe, determine whether the foreign truck was properly entered in the country, and determine whether the load is a legal NAFTA shipment into or out of the country. . . .

More importantly, even if one enforcement official could identify all of those facts, he or she would not have the authority to enforce more than one of these issues. . . . [T]wo of our four border states with Mexico have not given . . . enforcement personnel the power to put out-of-service a trucker found to not have the proper DOT operating authority. [The] administration is hurrying to allow Mexican trucks to operate not just in the border states but in all 48 lower states. . . . [E]very state needs to give its officers the power to put out-of-service those trucks operating in violation of our

laws, including the NAFTA rules.

Spencer also noted that

state officials are the only enforcement personnel that a foreign trucker is ever likely to see . . . State officials do not have the training to recognize whether a truck is in compliance with customs [and] immigration rules, or whether a load is being hauled legally under NAFTA rules . . . Some enforcement personnel have told OOIDA that their biggest frustration is not being able to communicate with foreign drivers to get their cooperation to conduct a safety inspection (being able to communicate in English is a requirement of the federal motor carrier safety regulations) . . . the enforcement officials in some states have given up trying to inspect foreign trucks. They just wave foreign trucks through the weigh station while U.S. truckers are stopped and put through the normal inspections. This is an outrageous state of affairs that we did not bargain for in NAFTA.

The language barrier is essentially a taboo subject, given the climate of political correctness, but, according to a July 24, 2002, UAW report, it can present con-

crete obstacles to safety and order:

"It's not talked about widely, but in terms of enforcement mechanisms, it's a big deal," [Major John] Hill [of the Indiana State Police] said. Inspectors already are dealing with a big upsurge in non-English speaking drivers. Michigan truck inspectors have to deal with more and more drivers from Russia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere who don't read, write or speak English, according to Bob Powers, commander of the motor carrier division of the Michigan State Police. Not knowing English is a safety issue when it comes to reading signs, especially with all the automated electric signs now used on highways. It also becomes difficult and sometimes impossible to do inspections when drivers can't speak English.

A larger issue remains: We are not all the same. The cultural differences come to a head-on collision in the way we travel and work. Courtesy *versus* egotism, order *versus* chaos, law *versus* anarchy, safety *versus* kamikaze behavior. As with guns, it is not the truck that is dangerous but the man behind the hammer.

V. Groginsky writes from Mexico City.



Russell Gorden

A three-semi-trailer collision on a main north-south highway brings traffic to a standstill for hours. The drivers fled the scene.

by Srdja Trifkovic

## The Balkan Terror Threat

A chain is as strong as its weakest link. In President Bush's "War on Terror," that weak link is not in the Middle East or North Africa or the Subcontinent but in Europe. For years, *Chronicles* has been warning that flawed pro-Muslim Western policies would turn the Balkans from a "protectorate of the New World Order into an Islamic threat to Western interests" (see, for example, "Osama bin Laden: The Balkan Connection," *Chronicles Intelligence Assessment*, December 2001). Such warnings were routinely ignored or discounted by the media and politicians alike. This attitude is rapidly changing, however. A spate of media reports and statements by Western officials over the past two months indicates that the threat is finally being taken seriously.

"US to build Balkan anti-terrorism center in Bulgaria," news agencies reported on January 6, to monitor and detect terrorist threats to the United States and other countries. In addition to the CIA-staffed center, Bulgarian media reported, the FBI also plans to set up an office in Sofia. U.S. intelligence experts were quoted as saying that Al Qaeda has a training base in the Balkans and uses the region as a terror route to the West.

That same week, an Associated Press report warned that terrorists could use the Balkan route to sneak a nuclear weapon into Europe by land. Tom Sanderson of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and Chris Wright of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London claimed that smuggling routes through Southeastern Europe were well established and that there was "a lot of scope" for collusion between terrorist groups and criminal gangs. Both criminals and terrorists benefit from heroin trafficking, most of it of Afghan origin. The trade is largely controlled by Albanian Muslims, with the *mujahideen* providing the logistics.

*Der Spiegel* reported on December 8, 2003, that the "monstrous" King Fahd mosque in Sarajevo—the largest in Europe, on which the Saudis spent a total of \$20 million—is a breeding ground for Islamic extremism in Bosnia, with some preachers openly inciting the faithful. Western security experts have said that

Bosnia could become "a hotbed of extremists ready to . . . carry the fight of the Islamic terror syndicates against the 'godless West' to the southeast of Europe." This gives cause for "extreme concern" to a German intelligence chief, August Hanning. The magazine goes on to quote a French expert as saying that, of some 5,000 foreign *mujahideen* who had fought on behalf of Izetbegovic, many remained behind. The number is unknown, but there are "too many to be safe," according to George Friedman, director of Stratfor. The Balkans are "of strategic importance" to Al Qaeda, he says, and it can use the region for its goals at any time.

Western officials reflect such concerns with increasing frequency. The U.S. ambassador in Sarajevo, Clifford Bond, thus declared on December 17 that there is a terrorist threat in Bosnia because of "foreign elements" who arrived there during the war and stayed on. In the same week, the cabinet of Greece's Prime Minister Costas Simitis expressed concern over the threat from Bosnia to the Olympic Games in August 2004.

"UN Adds Bosnian Charity Director to Al Qaeda List," Reuters reported only days later. Safet Durguti, an Albanian born in Kosovo, was added to the list of 300 individuals whose assets should be frozen because of suspected ties to Osama bin Laden or his Al Qaeda network. Durguti—apparently the key link between Islamic fundamentalists in Kosovo and Bosnia—is the director of Vazir, a charity based in the Bosnian city of Travnik. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Vazir was simply another name for the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, a Saudi charity that was placed on the U.N. list in March 2002.

Dozens of similar statements and articles appeared in different Western sources last January alone. Policy analysts and government officials alike freely admit that the problem exists. It has acquired massive proportions and may not be easily managed any longer. Whether it can be resolved short of a major restructuring of the current Balkan architecture is unclear.

The threat is not limited to a few elusive extremists: The ruling establishment



in Sarajevo has had a symbiotic relationship with the sources of Islamic radicalism for over a decade. "Iran, Bosnia to Expand Ties," reported Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting on December 21, regarding a meeting of the Bosnian ambassador to Tehran, Ibrahim Efendic, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. The latter said that "the Jihad of the Bosnian and Palestinian nations is praiseworthy and a source of honor for Muslims":

The resistance and faith of these nations will be registered in the history of Islam, he added . . . Highlighting the geographical status of the Balkans, Rafsanjani said Iran attaches great importance to Bosnia and Herzegovina and expressed the hope to witness further expansion of bilateral ties between the two countries. The outgoing Bosnian ambassador lauded the humanitarian aid rendered by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The significance of this overlooked story is that Bosnian Muslim government officials are received and treated in Tehran as allies in a *jihad* and that Muslims see Bosnia as no less important than Palestine to their strategic design. As for Iran's "humanitarian aid," this is a euphemism for illegal arms shipments from Tehran to Sarajevo in 1994. They were carried out with the active connivance of the Clinton administration and in violation of the arms embargo initially demanded by Clinton. Along with the weapons, Iranian Revolutionary Guards and VEVAK intelligence agents entered Bosnia in large numbers.

The problem of collusion between U.S. administrations and Islamic radicals antedates the wars of Yugoslav succession. Its roots go back to the support Osama bin