

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

**The North American Summit**

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**Q1: What is the purpose of the meeting among President George Bush, President Felipe Calderón of Mexico, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada on April 21–22 in New Orleans?**

**A1:** The three heads of state are meeting under the rubric of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), which was launched in March 2005 as a mechanism for increasing security and enhancing prosperity among the three countries through cooperation on a broad agenda of issues. The SPP initiative created a series of trilateral working groups to address key issues identified by the heads of state for priority attention, including travel and transportation security, public health, food safety, infrastructure protection, trade and business facilitation, energy, the environment, and competitiveness. At their 2006 summit, the leaders established the North American Competitiveness Council composed of senior private-sector representatives from the three countries to develop recommendations on issues related to that theme. In New Orleans, the heads of state will review the progress of the SPP and provide direction for future initiatives. Beyond the trilateral relationship, the three leaders will also discuss other regional and global issues of concern.

**Q2: Why is this meeting important?**

**A2:** The meeting is important in several ways. From a U.S. perspective, it underscores the centrality of the United States' bilateral relationships with Canada and Mexico. Canada is the United States' largest and Mexico its third-largest trade partner. They are the first- and second-largest suppliers of oil imported into the United States, respectively. The three countries are linked by the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the largest trading relationship in the world. The SPP process provides a useful mechanism for coordinating on a trilateral basis a broad array of initiatives spanning many of the key issues in the North American agenda. Progress in addressing these issues will enhance security in all three countries, as well as economic competitiveness.

**Q3: Will the meeting produce any surprises?**

**A3:** It is unlikely that any major new initiatives will be rolled out at the meeting. The SPP process is an ongoing cooperative relationship that produces important but not dramatic results. The leaders will probably use the event to underscore the importance of NAFTA at a time when the agreement is coming under fire from the Democratic candidates in the primary race. They will probably also use the occasion to express support for regional free trade, including the U.S.-Colombia trade agreement pending ratification.

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