

Uncle Sam and Canada after September 11th

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Washington's response to the catastrophe suffered on 11 September 2001 raised a double question in Canada about the consequences for its relationship with its only neighbour, the global hegemon. Would an obsessive American campaign against global terrorism jeopardize what political autonomy Ottawa had managed to retain under the heightened continental integration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)? And once the life-and-death issues of military security had been addressed in Afghanistan, what would be the fall-out for Canada in terms of security and economic access to the world's largest commercial and capital market?

The immediate blockading of American borders and airports conjured up the prospect of a surgical severing of those Siamese twins otherwise known as the Canadian-American economy, a radical operation from which the tiny twin could hardly be expected to recover. For the first hours and days after the shock, rational thought about the continental economy was no match for the hysteria that overtook Washington about its terrorist threat. Scenarios of a Fortress America that erected not just commercial but human fortifications along the 49th parallel and the Rio Grande sent Canadians a frightening message that, after decades of pursuing an ever deeper intermingling of the two systems, they now faced immediate and total exclusion.

The alternative to total exclusion seemed total inclusion. The scenario competing with a Fortress America defined narrowly as the territories of the 50 US states, was a

¹This text draws on analysis contained in chapter 19 of my *Uncle Sam and Us: Globalization, Neoconservatism, and the Canadian State* (Toronto and Washington: University of Toronto and Woodrow Wilson Presses, 2002).

broader Fortress North America. In this optic, to be brought within these continental fortifications, Canada would have to accept not just a common currency and external tariffs proclaiming a customs union but harmonized immigration, refugee, intelligence, and security policies in which it would abandon its autonomy in return for protection within the American sanctuary.

The special problematic generated by sharing a common border with the United States is what differentiated the Canadian response from those of other countries. Because the 8,900 kilometre border constitutes the United States' longest frontier with another state, Canada presents a special internal security concern to Washington. After all, there are 425 border crossings, and over 500,000 people cross the Canada-US border each *day*. But with \$1.9 billion worth of daily trade—that is, 81 per cent of Canada's exports and 71 per cent of its imports—traversing the boundary largely by truck, the same border causes Canada acute concern about its *economic* security. Any measure that slows trade simultaneously imposes a serious liability on the increasingly integrated Canadian-American economic system.

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Initial responses to this double problematic veered from one extreme to another. The unruffled among Canadian analysts held that nothing had changed on September 11th, except that the human calamity suffered by workers in the twin towers and the Pentagon had brought Americans into the club of the vulnerable to which the rest of the world already belonged. Those successful suicide missions were only spectacular dramatizations of globalization's dark side. To be sure, Al-Qaeda's stunning coup showed that security measures and intelligence capabilities would need to be improved in Canada in close conjunction with every other government, particularly that of the United States — which needed to make the greatest changes given the September-11 terrorists' admission to and freedom of movement on American soil.

Such northern cool was dismissed by alarmists in Canada when the traffic gridlock at customs posts caused panic in boardrooms. According to their view, if Canada wanted to re-establish an open economic border with the United States, it would have to pursue a

degree of military integration with the United States even greater than what it had accepted during the Cold War. In effect, Canada would have to merge not just its air force but its army and naval forces within the US command structure.

Full support for the American response to Islamic terrorism came naturally to the Canadian military, the strategic and industrial integration of which was first defined in formal agreements during World War II and then institutionalized during the Cold War through numerous arrangements—most prominent of which was the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD) created in 1957. Canadian leaders had become used to endorsing whatever strategic doctrine on nuclear retaliation the Pentagon might issue as it responded to new circumstances and incorporated its military-industrial complex's latest technologies in its war plans.

Defence analysts agree that Canada has to defend its territory against any US-defined enemy lest the Pentagon do it anyway. In the Cold War, for instance, the very real Soviet ballistic missile threat forced Ottawa to integrate its air interception and space surveillance within the US-controlled NORAD framework. Immediate post-September 11th behaviour on both sides of the 49th parallel seemed to confirm that the Cold War provided the appropriate template for a redefined Canadian-American security relationship. George W. Bush's rhetorical declaration of war against terrorism connected Canada to the state of mind that existed before the Berlin Wall came down, namely a war psychosis that rallied the forces of light against an evil, if invisible, empire. In this apocalyptic spirit, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien immediately endorsed the Bush Doctrine and offered his armed forces for the execution of the US military attack against the Taliban government and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Ottawa's decision in early 2002 to send 750 Canadian soldiers in the Princess Patricia Light Infantry Battle Group to be deployed in Kandahar implemented this declaration of solidarity. Having its troops fighting not just with but for the Americans raised questions in Parliament about the troops' subordination to US command. The principal concern was their violating the Geneva Convention by handing over their prisoners to the Americans who refused to accord their captives the rights of captured

soldiers. Consternation spilled out from the House of Commons to the whole country when on the night of April 18 four Canadian soldiers on a night-time training exercise were killed by a bomb dropped on them by an American pilot mistaking them for the enemy.

In offering the Princess Pats to do America's deadly work in the mopping-up phase of its high-tech bombing war, the Chrétien government had sent an unambiguous signal to Washington. So too did maintaining in the US-led naval task group in the Arabian Sea units of the Canadian navy such as the Halifax class frigates which are the only foreign naval vessels to be fully integrated into US carrier battle groups.

Integrating its troops in the US military machine gave the White House the message that Canada was fully on side. Ottawa's main priority was not reconstruction in Afghanistan. It was credit with Uncle Sam in a situation starkly different from that of the Cold War. Then the issue was a common but distant and external military threat to both the hegemon and its northern neighbour, leaving their common border as a traditional inter-state barrier whose economic height was determined by tariffs and whose human height was set by immigration and tourist regulations.

It ultimately became apparent, however, that the Cold War's military template hardly applied if the threat was less from visible states—and their organized armed forces—than from invisible networks the destructive capacity of which could be cunningly embedded throughout the world's multicultural mosaic. A campaign against terrorism had to be conducted by intelligence and police forces cooperating globally to detect the planning and then prevent the execution of sabotage. The role of the military became secondary in this effort of trans-social sleuthing since neither al-Qaeda nor any “axis-of-evil” rogue state presented a military danger to North America. Washington had to assume that ‘sleepers’ continued to go about their otherwise normal daily routines anywhere in the United States, even as fully fledged US citizens professing they loved America as much as Allah.

This absence of a traditional defence problem did not prevent some Canadians, including leading figures in the armed forces, from arguing that the new realities revealed

on September 11th required the full integration of Canada's navy and army within their American counterpart services—i.e., a step beyond military interoperability. As retired historian J.L. Granatstein argued in an apparently self-contradicting paper published by the C.D. Howe Institute, Canada must make a dramatic move into further military integration with the United States in order to preserve its independence and sovereignty. Granatstein's proposals included the extension of NORAD to include control of the eventual, if technologically dubious, National Missile Defence (NMD) system. Canada had "no choice" but to support this cosmic Maginot Line in the hope that its space weapons will be controlled by NORAD. This would guarantee Canada vast flows of intelligence plus influence, including the right to be consulted, the right to participate, and the right to sit at the table where decisions are to be made.

Wherever that happy table may be located under a future NMD, Canadian influence at the existing NORAD table appears next to nil. Even though it was the second-in-command Canadian officer who was in charge at NORAD's headquarters deep inside a Colorado mountain on September 11th, its alerts were taken without Ottawa either being consulted beforehand or informed afterwards.

Granatstein maintained Canada had to support the US administration's military priorities or risk suffering damaging economic retaliation from an angry Washington. Because September 11, 2001 created "a new situation and new threats," he wrote, Canada's policies could not risk being perceived as anti-American or based on "morality". Startling for a text published in a series designed to generate a public debate was Granatstein's insistence that there was nothing to discuss. Herein lay one of the differences between Granatstein's June polemic and the study published for the Institute for Research on Public Policy by Dan Middlemiss and Denis Stairs. "The Canadian Forces and the Doctrine of Interoperability" called for a public debate on the subject, apparently in the belief that there was something to discuss.

The conclusion that Canada had no choice but to integrate its military forces with the United States was a Canadian solution in search of a not-yet-existent American need. Preliminary evidence that the White House was not overly exercised about its Canadian

connections could be seen in its Department of Homeland Security, which was about reorganizing domestic institutions. Subsequent proof that the Pentagon was not particularly concerned with a northern threat could be seen in its Northern Command (NORTHCOM), created in April 2002 to integrate the US military's four autonomous services within a single entity and be responsible for North American defence. It was also given a mandate to cooperate with its neighbours' armed forces. If NORTHCOM's formal mandate is to "cooperate" with Canada and Mexico, this suggests that the reorganized American military's domestic mission is not to integrate with, let alone displace, these forces.

As for the Bush administration's inherently self-defeating plans to put weapons in space and attack Iraq, it was as unlikely that the White House would exact retribution for Ottawa's non-compliance as it was repugnant to make a policy reversal out of simple cowardice. This more autonomist school of thought argued that Canada should develop its military capacity not to provide a northern garrison for Washington's homeland defence but to enhance the United Nations' capacity for constructive intervention in situations of social disintegration that threatened human security as in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In short, meaningful autonomy in practice required real autonomy in mind.

A possible target in its own right for al-Qaeda's retribution, Canada had in any case to look to its own defences against terrorism. As with its Cold-War military policy, Ottawa's non-military policy response to September 11th was consequently driven both by *domestic* and by *American* demands for security against terror. Between these two pressures on Canadian policy there was some common ground and some divergence.

The domestic needs of Canadian security are not substantially different from those of governments elsewhere facing increased threat levels. With the globalization of terrorism, domestic security has necessarily become transnationalized for all countries. Canada's security perimeter now extends to every visa office, seaport, and international airport—whether Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt, or Tokyo — from which dangerous weapons could be shipped or potential terrorists could arrive, presenting themselves as immigrants, refugees who have lost or destroyed their documents, or eager

tourists with dollars to spend on sightseeing in the Rockies. Defence against terrorism requires a generalized sharing of data among intelligence services using the latest technologies to ferret out the dangerous and then track their movements. The role of the military is secondary in this effort of trans-social sleuthing. Primary is the work of immigration, customs, intelligence, and police forces cooperating globally to detect the planning and then abort the execution of horrific acts.

In the aftermath of September 11th the Canadian government's signals were mixed. Despite Chrétien's instantly offered expressions of sympathy and the government's quickly organizing a mass demonstration on Parliament Hill of public solidarity with the victims, the prime minister was made to appear niggardly in his support of the Bush agenda by the cheerleader standard set by Tony Blair, his British counterpart. In suggesting that September 11th had not radically changed the parameters of the military or the subversive threat posed by terrorism, he appeared to endorse positions expressed by the unruffled observers. In acting back-stage with energetic enthusiasm to transform Canada's security stance, his government seemed in practice to be closer to the views of the alarmist who insisted that the acid test would be American satisfaction that Ottawa and the provinces were harmonizing to Washington's standards.

But if the US government required the complete harmonization of Canadian and American practices and the full integration of their personnel and data-gathering, Canadian security would suffer. Since 1996, Ottawa's refugee and immigration control system has put officers in airports abroad where they have stopped more than 33,000 people with dubious documentation before they boarded planes for Canada. If immigration security in Canada was considered tougher than in the United States, then continentalizing the insecurity that characterized American society—including the ease with which al-Qaeda's plotters could immigrate and train at flight schools—would clearly be retrograde.

Within the understandably heated debates around these issues, the American Ambassador to Canada was an important voice of reasoned calm. For Paul Cellucci, the issue was gaining informed American confidence in Canadian procedures. Standards for

accepting desirable immigrants and procedures for despatching dangerous applicants could be the same, or different, as long as they were effective. A process of intense, often tense, bilateral discussions between officials took place through the autumn of 2001, with Canadian officials explaining their practices to their predictably overbearing, but frequently less knowledgeable, US counterparts.

Ottawa proceeded to take measures strengthening Canada's internal counter-terrorism capacity on a wide variety of fronts, many of which implemented the country's international obligations spelled out in treaties Ottawa had helped negotiate. Finance Minister Paul Martin's fall 2001 budget allocated C\$7.7 billion for five years to the various terrorist-control and border-maintenance programs, a sum proportionately larger than the US allocation to the same objectives. Some new legislation was also introduced. Bill C-36, the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, which became law on 18 December 2001, defined terrorist activity broadly and decreed tougher sentences for terrorism offences. A new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* came into force on 28 June 2002 to introduce higher penalties for immigration offences and declare violators of international human rights, members of organized crime syndicates, and other security threats ineligible for refugee status.

It was the government of Canada that actually set the bilateral agenda on border issues, because it had done its homework and because it was institutionally more nimble than the US administration. For years Ottawa had been trying to get Washington to undertake joint measures to improve border security (detecting dangerous immigrants) and increase border efficiency (waving through reliable cargoes while focussing on higher risk shipments). Canada-US border partnership talks had been initiated with the Clinton administration, but had not gone far. Once September 11th caused the US government to focus on the issue, Ottawa had coherent plans ready to propose such as Integrated Border Enforcement Teams and fraud-resistant permanent identity cards for new immigrants.

The Canadian counterpart to former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, whom Bush appointed to coordinate his administration's action on homeland security, was

Foreign Minister John Manley whom the prime minister assigned as point man on Canada-US security relations. Whereas Ridge took months to get the new homeland security administration organized, the centralization inherent in parliamentary government gave Manley immediate command over all the federal government's relevant programs and officials.

As a result, the Canadian embassy in Washington could claim that the bulk of the 30-Point Smart Border Action Plan signed by Ridge and Manley in December 2001 was Canadian-inspired, although the stationing of US customs inspectors in major Canadian seaports that act as transshipment depots for cargoes heading for the United States was clearly a Washington demand. Measures announced in order to satisfy the government's two publics—its electorate at home and the hegemon in Washington—raised the perennial question of Canadian sovereignty. But if the Canadian public agreed with the Liberals in wanting heightened levels of security, little autonomy seemed to have been sacrificed.

Developments since September 11²⁰⁰¹ have confirmed the Prime Minister's initial unruffled hypothesis that the terrorist attacks had not fundamentally changed Canada's security parameters. With the US success in Afghanistan and the worldwide toughening of anti-terrorist surveillance having virtually eliminated al-Qaeda's capacity to wreak havoc, President Bush has had to resort to Iraq to maintain the sense of high anxiety necessary for a permanent war mentality. Meanwhile, Washington had learned that, with the anthrax attacks having domestic roots, total security was a pipe dream and that, even if its northern neighbour was disconcertingly liberal in its social policies, Canada's immigration procedures were tight and its officials reliable. With trade flows across the border having largely returned to normal, the Canadian business community had backed away from such ideas as 'dollarization' through a North American currency union. Talk of a customs union and labour market and military integration remained just that – palavers to which the country's think tanks and policy elites devoted themselves with more gusto than expectations of success.

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Canada has not been condemned to look haplessly and hopelessly across an impassable moat at a Fortress America. Nevertheless, in practice, it cannot opt out of some kinds of dependence, as Middlemiss and Stairs point out in their analysis. As they illustrate, Canada-US military interoperability covers a spectrum stretching from common weapons, through communications systems to total integration of command structures from which Canada would have little capacity to withdraw.

There are always choices, however, including choosing to reject the position that Canada has no choice but to move to military interoperability or even integration with the United States. We can all agree with Jack Granatstein that, after two decades of budget cutting, Canada's armed forces need rebuilding and therefore refinancing. However, we can choose to dedicate these interoperable troops not to defending our neighbour's homeland but to fulfilling this country's peacekeeping aspirations and peacebuilding obligations. In doing this we may make a bigger contribution to tackling the causes of terrorism than we would by endorsing the current US administration's dangerously counterproductive strategy.

Canada does not have to beg for inclusion within Fortress North America through offering total policy harmonization. In place of these extremes of exclusion or annexation, Ottawa can continue to manage its relationship with the United States on a pragmatic, case-by-case basis. And on global issues such as the International Criminal Court, which Ottawa supports to promote human security in the international system, it can continue to oppose Washington's position at the United Nations.

In short, if a famous American poet could insist that good fences make good neighbours, a post-September 11th Canadian response about its role in the world relative to the United States could be what it had been before 2001: good neighbours should make good fences.