

WebMemo



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U.S., Canada Working Together on Improving Border Security

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On January 15, the United States Northern Command Joint Task Force-North accidentally released to the public a briefing that expressed concerns over terrorists entering the U.S. from Canada. While the report was taken offline and out of public view shortly thereafter, this briefing is one of many reports centered on U.S./Canadian security policies, including a recent request by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano for information relating to the mechanisms and programs currently in place at the U.S. northern border.

While the recommendations of the U.S. Northern Command briefing were not made public, the recent focus on the northern border has left many citizens from both countries concerned that the U.S. might decide to increase security measures at the border in a way that would hamper trade and travel. Initiatives to secure the United States from potential terrorists in Canada should extend beyond the border and center on information-sharing and other kinds of anti-terrorism cooperation, instituting processes and programs that respect both nations' sovereignty, and addresses common concerns—without hindering either nation's economic viability.

Economic Reliance. The U.S. Northern Command briefing cited Canada as a “favorable” environment for potential terrorists entering the U.S. due to the Canadian immigration policies toward aliens from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Egypt. The briefing specifically cited the Great Lakes region of Canada and areas north of New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire as the areas of most concern and

indicated that terrorists could be forming networks out of these regions.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) created the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) in 2004 to increase security on the northern border. This initiative requires proof of identity and citizenship for people crossing the border into the United States. But unfortunately, WHTI has significantly increased wait times at border crossing, delays which have been particularly damaging to those business that rely on the “just in time” process—that is, delivering products (such as fresh produce) just before they are made available for purchase.

This new briefing might well tempt Congress or DHS to institute similar or more aggressive security measures at the border; but this is not the right path for the following reasons:

- *Trade and travel:* Canada is the United States' biggest trading partner. Every day approximately \$1.5 billion in goods and 300,000 people cross the northern border. Adding new security measures at the border without hurting the two economies would be extremely difficult.
- *U.S.–Canadian relations:* Canada is one of America's best allies. Canada's support in Afghanistan is

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one of the many illustrations of its committed friendship with the United States. Hardening the border would signal mistrust between these long-time allies and place a strain on the future of the American–Canadian relationship.

- *Cost:* The Canadian border is large, spanning 5,525 miles. It would cost the U.S. government a tremendous amount of resources to successfully secure the physical border. Given the economic (not to mention public diplomacy) consequences associated with such an effort, the U.S. should not spend precious resources in this manner.

Beyond the Physical Border. The U.S. should look to “beyond the border” solutions—solutions that stop terrorists from entering North America altogether—and work together with Canada to arrest individuals engaged in plotting against either country. DHS and Congress should:

- *Promote anti-terrorism information sharing.* Information sharing is the most effective way of tracking down dangerous people and protecting the country from attack. Information on a variety of things, such as criminal databases and customs information, should be shared between the two countries to enhance their anti-terrorism capabilities and to arrest those who seek to do harm.
- *Expand cross-border law enforcement programs.* Working together on law enforcement initiatives will make each country’s homeland security much more efficient. Law enforcement can often disrupt terrorist activity before it starts, and improving cooperation in this area will bear fruit on both sides of the border. A great example of this kind of program is the Integrated Border Enforcement Team, a joint program that targets dangerous people and goods by sharing intelligence and law enforcement capabilities from various agencies. Similar cooperation efforts should be used for security missions.

- *Coordinate visa policies.* For example, U.S. and Canada should offer visa waiver status for the same list of countries. Coordinated visa policies will ensure that both countries institute similar security mechanisms in a way that is in compliance with America’s security standards.
- *Encourage private investment in infrastructure.* Inadequate infrastructure at the border further jeopardizes security. The U.S. should find ways to encourage the private sector to invest in infrastructure (such as toll bridges) at the northern border. This will not only speed the processing of goods and services but will ensure that terrorists are not sneaking through because of gaps in ailing infrastructure. One way this can be accomplished is through the SAFETY Act, which provides liability protection for companies developing homeland security technologies. This protection is only for companies in the United States and greatly limits the deployment of these necessary technologies. By encouraging similar protections in Canada, DHS can help spur innovation and private investment in infrastructure at the border.

Good Neighbors. It is in the interest of both nations to keep terrorists out of North America. Working together, the U.S. and Canada can tackle security loopholes to ensure the security of Americans and Canadians alike while, at the same time, not disrupting economic ties or jeopardizing their close friendship.

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