WebMemo
Published by The Heritage Foundation
No. 2404
April 19, 2009

Canada and the United States: Time for a Joint Threat Assessment

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Currently, Canada and the United States share information and intelligence, cooperate extensively on law enforcement issues—particularly border-related crime and terrorist travel—and work together to thwart potential air and sea threats. Both countries routinely, and respectively, produce national intelligence assessments that are frequently published in unclassified form so that citizens can gain a better appreciation of their government's perception of current and emerging national security challenges.

The present landscape, marked by new threats and uncertainties, presents a challenge—but also an opportunity—for Canada and the United States. A joint threat assessment, conducted and published by both countries, could be a powerful protective tool on both sides of the 49th parallel. It need not—and should not—diminish sovereign capabilities and capacities on either side; to the contrary, it could enhance both.

A Strong Foundation. To date, joint Canada–U.S. counterterrorism efforts have focused largely on the border and, to a lesser extent, on keeping foreign terrorists out of both countries and countering domestic extremists. Emphasis on security has in turn largely crowded out matters of trade and its facilitation. Yet Canada and the United States are each other's largest and most important trading partner, with cross-border activity generating more than $1 billion per day.

Allowing that trade engine to run as smoothly as possible requires identifying and addressing problems long before they present themselves at the border, as well as adopting efficient yet prudent border security measures. A joint threat assessment would go a long way toward deepening the foundation of mutual understanding upon which the most productive ways forward, for all concerned, may be built.

The Scope. What might be the scope of such an assessment? At a minimum, it should include:

- An evaluation of the level and nature of "homegrown" radicalization in the two countries as well as overseas;
- An analysis of concerning strategic and tactical developments and trends in the cyber arena;
- An examination of terrorist, organized crime, and other significant bad actors' travel to and between Canada and the United States (to include watch lists);
- An assessment of these actors' exploitation of and threats to the movement of cargo, mail, and both transnational and domestic supply chains; and
- An evaluation of vulnerabilities in the energy sector and infrastructure shared between the two nations, notably the power grid.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandSecurity/wm2404.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002–4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

As important as the assessment itself is the manner in which it is derived and the process by which it is shared. Both countries' intelligence and law enforcement services should participate equally. Public hearings could be held in both countries in furtherance of the assessment's goals. Indeed, the process of developing the assessment should be as transparent as possible with publicly available information on how the assessment is being conducted and by whom.

The final product should be easily available in unclassified format to citizens in both countries, though this would not preclude a classified treatment of the issues to be disseminated to relevant officials and authorities. Whether created and shared exclusively as an open source document or not, it is important to note that the joint assessment would not, of itself, render other existing threat assessments irrelevant.

Finally, if properly conceived and implemented, such measures could have the added salutary effect of strengthening the bonds of trust and confidence between and among citizens and with their government—the very bonds that those with malicious intent seek to damage, if not break.

Secure, Yet Sovereign. To be clear, a joint threat assessment need not be a precursor, or tantamount, to common policies. As envisioned, each country would and should retain discretion to tailor its approach to the needs and particular circumstances of both its history and the future it aspires to shape for itself and its people. Transnational threats may require transnational solutions, but even the newest and deadliest of these challenges can be addressed without compromising the essence of what it means to be "Canadian" or "American" in approach.

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