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Shiprider Program Demonstrates U.S.–Canadian Cooperation

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On May 27, the U.S and Canada made the Integrated Maritime Security Operation pilot program—better known as “Shiprider”—permanent. This program is an example of the extensive and well-integrated marine defense relationship between the two countries.

Extending the program will provide for a more efficient system of managing the shared U.S.–Canadian marine border, securing waters from terrorists and criminals, and protecting America’s vital economic trade route with Canada. Going forward, the U.S. and Canada should seek additional opportunities for further cross-border cooperation.

Murky Waters. The following scenario has played out countless times in various locations across the 3000 mile U.S.–Canadian maritime border: A watercraft suspected of carrying illegal drugs and heading toward the U.S.–Canadian border—a line not hard to verify given the advent of modern technology like the global positioning device—is being pursued by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). Yet when the smuggler crosses the border, the USCG pulls back and stops pursuit in order to respect Canadian national sovereignty.

At that point, the USCG officers manning the boat radio their Canadian colleagues to notify them that a suspected smuggler is heading in their direction. However, by the time the Canadian patrol boat makes its way to the area, the smuggler will be able to escape.

This is just one example of the kinds of scenarios that U.S. and Canadian authorities deal with on a daily basis. While the above-scenario imagined drug

runners exploiting the border, consider a similar scenario except this time the criminal is a terrorist moving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosives across either side of the border.

In the post-9/11 era, terrorism is no longer always committed by an identifiable nation-state. Consequently, such crimes are more difficult to control. Furthermore, the Great Lakes region alone is home to 32 million people, spread out over eight states and two Canadian provinces—such an international border of this geographic immensity and consisting of such a dense population means that seams in security are more likely to be created. Terrorists and criminals are aware of this geopolitical ambiguity and look for ways to exploit it.

Shiprider Changes the Game. The Shiprider program was created in 2005 by the U.S. and Canadian governments to mitigate and eliminate the exploitation of these security seams. Instead of ceasing pursuit at the marine border, USCG officers now jointly patrol shared waterways with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). As a result, the USCG now has the ability to continue to the other side of the border to pursue terrorists and criminals.

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Under the Shiprider program, officers from the USCG and the RCMP are assigned to each other's watercrafts. In the course of their duties, if the patrolling officers deem it necessary to engage a suspected terrorist or criminal on the water and the watercraft is on the U.S. side of the border the lead USCG officer will be the principle acting officer—subject to the search, seizure, and arresting laws and regulations of the U.S. If the watercraft is on the Canadian side of the border, the opposite principles apply.

To ensure efficacy of the program, participating USCG and RCMP officers attended a two-week joint training session at the USCG Maritime Law Enforcement Academy. This special curriculum, which consists of lectures and exercises, was created by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, USCG, and RCMP to address the unique intricacies of using one watercraft to patrol the waters of two sovereign nations. After graduating from the program, the RCMP members are cross-designated as U.S. officers of the customs and USCG officers are cross-designated as supernumerary constables of the RCMP.

A Shared Responsibility. The U.S. and Canada should share responsibility for the securing the northern border.

Eliminating Bureaucratic “Red Tape.” Working together decreases bureaucratic “red tape” and encourages greater openness in communication between U.S. and Canadian law enforcement agencies—which, in turn, leads to better working relationships between the individual intelligence agencies.

Inhibiting the Travel of Terrorists and Criminals. Programs like Shiprider make everyone safer by inhibiting the travel of terrorists and criminals. During a two-month span in the summer of 2007, Shiprider watercrafts boarded 187 suspect vessels. The Shipriders seized over 200 pounds of marijuana, more than 1 million contraband cigarettes, \$38,000 (CAD) in illicit cash, and six vessels used in illegal smuggling operations. These operations also resulted in the arrests of 12 people.

In addition, the patrols also led to land-based seizures of large quantities of contraband cigarettes, other drugs, and weapons.

Protecting Vital Trade. It is well-documented that the U.S. and Canada share the world's largest and most comprehensive trading relationship: Both countries are each other's largest trading partner, with cross-border trade generating more than \$1.5 billion worth of goods and services daily.

The trade relationship is also vital to individual state economies of the 48 lower U.S. states. To put the trade relationship into perspective, as of 2008, 35 states have Canada as their leading export market, and the remaining 13 have Canada as either their second or third leading export market.

A great deal of the goods involved in this trade are transported over border waters: Upwards of 200 million tons of maritime cargo are transported annually across the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence region alone. As Captain Patrick W. Brennan of the U.S. Coast Guard aptly noted in his testimony on northern border security before the House Armed Services Committee in 2006: “That's more than the trade of Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Norfolk—combined—by nearly 100 million tons.”

Going Forward with Cooperation. A well-integrated and coordinated marine border policy such as the Shiprider program is just one component in America's strategy to secure the northern border, thereby ensuring long-term prosperity and security. Going forward, the U.S. and Canada should:

- *Conduct a joint threat assessment.* The U.S. and Canada should assess the threats facing both countries. This 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. The results of this assessment can help to shape future joint efforts.
- *Better coordinate visa policies.* To stop terrorists from entering North America, it would be best if both nations worked toward better coordinating their visa policies. For example, U.S. and Canada should offer visa waiver status for the same list of countries.
- *Maintain and expand upon Shiprider.* Shiprider is a valuable program because it keeps Americans and Canadians safer while protecting trade. It

should have continued support from both sides of the border.

When the U.S. works with its Canadian neighbor on border security in an integrated, sustained, and consistent manner, the results are far superior than if the two nations worked separately.

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