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Beyond the Border: Enhancing Security and Improving Trade Between the United States and Canada

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On December 7, President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper released the “Beyond the Border Action Plan.” Following on a declaration issued by both nations’ leaders in February, the action plan lays out a joint vision to enhance security and accelerate the flow of people and goods between the two nations.

Already, the United States and Canada cooperate extensively to share information and intelligence, enhance law enforcement cooperation, and thwart potential air and sea threats through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). However, by building on existing initiatives and working to foster perimeter-based security, the initiative seeks to enhance joint counterterrorism efforts and facilitate safe and efficient trade and travel.

Beyond the Border Action Plan. Connected by a 5,525-mile shared land border and over 115,000 flights per year, the U.S. and Canada generate more than \$1 billion in trade per day between themselves. Ensuring that this engine runs as smoothly as possible is equally important as enhancing the two nations’ joint security.

Marrying both these objectives, the action plan sets forth a long-term coordinated plan for facilitating shared security and the flow of trade and travel. Rather than centering on bilateral border security, the action plan seeks a perimeter approach to stop transnational threats before they reach North America. At the same time, this approach would help ease traf-

fic congestion at the border and coordinate efforts at cross-border travel and trade. In doing so, the Action plan focuses on four main areas of cooperation:

1. **Addressing threats early.** The best way to safeguard Canada and the United States from transnational terrorists is to keep them out of North America in the first place. By working to address threats as early as possible, terrorists and other threats can be stopped long before they reach the shores of either nation. In order to achieve this goal, the plan calls for enhanced intelligence and information sharing, developing a joint threat assessment to analyze security gaps, streamlining the tracking of cargo and travelers, and coordinating efforts in countering violent extremism.
2. **Trade facilitation, economic growth, and jobs.** Last year, trade between the U.S. and Canada totaled approximately \$525.3 billion, making Canada the United States’ top trading partner. The action plan seeks to enhance the flow of legitimate trade and travel through increased investments in infrastructure and technology at many of the 120 points of

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entry along the U.S.–Canada border and expanding the trusted traveler and trade program.

3. **Cross-border law enforcement.** Building on a strong history of cross-border law enforcement through the maritime security Shiprider program, as well as the Border Enforcement Security Task Forces and the Integrated Border Enforcement Teams, the action plan seeks to further improve information sharing among law enforcement officers and enhance cooperation with regard to national security and transnational criminal investigations.
4. **Critical infrastructure and cybersecurity.** In addition to enhancing trade, security, and law enforcement cooperation, the action plan seeks to strengthen the resiliency of the United States and Canada's shared critical and cyber infrastructures and strengthen the ability of both nations to respond to and recover from disasters and emergencies on either side of the border.

Building on a Vital Partnership. Further fostering this vital partnership and working to ensure that North America remains free, safe, and prosperous is of the utmost importance. The policies laid out in the action plan represent a key first step, but more can be done. In order to build upon these efforts, the United States and Canada should seek to:

- **Coordinate visa policies.** Both the U.S. and Canada offer visa-free travel to certain countries. In the U.S., the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows citizens from 36 member nations to visit the country for 90 days without obtaining visas. In order to ensure that visitors admitted under VWP do not pose a security risk, individuals are first vetted through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization. Canada has a similar program, also intended to enhance tourism and business while boosting national security. Canada and the U.S. should work to coordinate their visa policies and grant visa waiver status to citizens of the same countries. Coordinated visa policies would help to ensure that both nations apply the same standards for admission, enhancing internal security for both countries.
- **Expand NORAD to include Mexico.** NORAD is an American and Canadian military command that provides aerospace and maritime warning

for North America. Established in 1958 to confront the growing Soviet bomber threat, NORAD has repeatedly adapted to the evolving security environment. NORAD should now adapt further by expanding both its membership and its range of functions. The U.S. and Canada should invite Mexico to join NORAD, which would greatly enhance NORAD's aerial and maritime surveillance capabilities in North America and help to build a common strategic vision among North American countries that respects and strengthens the sovereignty of each nation while addressing common threats and concerns.

- **Enhance efforts to spur private investment in border infrastructure.** The action plan calls for both nations to invest in improving shared border infrastructure and technology. Investments in bridges, roads, and infrastructure at the 120 points of entry along the border are key not only to ensuring enhanced security but also in facilitating the ease of cross-border trade and travel. Simply throwing government money at the problem, however, should not be the solution. Instead, both governments should seek to encourage private-sector investment along the border. One way to accomplish this goal is through the SAFETY Act, which provides liability protection to companies developing homeland security technologies. While SAFETY Act protections are currently available only to companies within the United States, encouraging similar protections within Canada would help to spur private-sector innovation in infrastructure along the border.

Shared Border, Shared Interests. With the economies, societies, and infrastructure of the U.S. and Canada so closely intertwined, a threat to one nation is a threat to the other. The right approach to joint U.S.–Canada security serves to emphasize the two nations' economic and diplomatic ties and ensure that North America remains free, safe, and prosperous.

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