

# Canada and US launch continental “security perimeter” talks

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and US President Barack Obama announced, at the conclusion of a White House meeting earlier this month, the launching of bilateral North American Security Perimeter talks.

The stated aim of the negotiations is to greatly enhance the integration of Canadian and US border security and the harmonization of the two countries’ national security, immigration, refugee and regulatory regimes, so as to strengthen continental security, facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and people, and promote “economic competitiveness.”

The negotiations are to be based on a joint declaration Harper and Obama issued following their February 4 meeting. “Beyond the Border: a shared vision for perimeter security and economic competitiveness” calls for the longstanding across-the-board security cooperation between the Canadian and US militaries, police forces, and border protection agencies—including through NATO and the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD)—to be taken to a new level. “We intend,” states the joint declaration, “to pursue a perimeter approach to security, working together within, at, and away from the borders of our two countries to enhance our security and the legitimate flow of people, goods and services.”

The statement pledges the two countries will work together “to develop, implement, manage and monitor security initiatives, standards and practices” in the air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace and otherwise “enhance the security of our integrated transportation and communications networks.”

This will include “improved intelligence and information sharing” and other forms of enhanced cooperation with the aim of identifying, preventing, and countering “violent extremism” and verifying the identity of travelers.

The two countries will develop common standards for the collection and transmission of travelers’ biometrics and a common system for tracking persons entering and leaving Canada and the US. The statement also says that the two countries will “build on existing bilateral law enforcement programs to develop the next generation of integrated cross-border law enforcement operations.”

In other words, the negotiations are aimed at building up the repressive apparatus of the state on both sides of the border and furthering collaboration between the two states’ large and growing military and intelligence apparatuses.

Harper and Obama have established a bilateral Beyond the Border Working Group to develop a “joint Plan of Action” to

realize the goals outlined in their declaration. They have also established a United States-Canada Regulatory Cooperation Council with a two-year mandate to harmonize and streamline public health and safety and environmental regulations to improve “economic competitiveness”—that is, corporate profits.

Harper, in a separate statement, emphasized the Canadian elite’s commitment to its strategic-military partnership with Washington and Wall Street, declaring “a threat to the United States is a threat to Canada, to our trade, to our interests, to our values, and to our common civilization.”

“Canada,” continued Harper, “has no friends among America’s enemies. And America has no better friend than Canada.”

Obama, in a remark that underscored that the implications of the proposed enhanced partnership between Canada and the US go far beyond the shores of North America, thanked the Canadian Prime Minister for his government’s recent decision to extend the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces personnel to Afghanistan for a further three years through 2014.

Powerful sections of the Canadian ruling elite have long been pressing for the creation of a North American security perimeter so as to underpin and deepen the economic partnership and continental economic integration fostered by the 1989 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and its successor NAFTA. Represented by such organizations as the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association, these sections of the ruling class view closer economic and security integration with the US as an essential element in their response to the emergence of new powers in Asia, the division of the world market into regional trading blocs, the growth of geopolitical tensions among the great powers, and the ever-diminishing share of global trade and investment that falls to Canadian capital. They also view closer integration with the US as providing them with a lever to press for regressive changes in socioeconomic and national security policy that have hitherto been resisted by the populace.

That said, Canadian big business is also driven by fear that the benefits they have accrued from the free trade agreement with the US are being eroded. In particular they fear the continued “thickening” of the Canada-US border—the gamut of new restrictions and impediments Washington has placed on the free movement of goods and people between the two countries in the name of the “war on terror.”

During the 1990s, the rapid growth of Canada-US trade was a major engine of economic growth in Canada. While the reduction

of tariffs and reorientation of the Canadian economy to more fully serve the US market was associated with factory closures and social dislocation for the working class, it swelled corporate profits.

The last decade, however, saw a sharp drop in the percentage of Canada's trade going to the US, from slightly under 85 percent to around 73 percent. While many factors contributed to this, including the growth of competition from Asia and the rise in the value of the Canadian dollar, Canada's trade with the US was badly impacted by the "thickening" of the Canada-US border following the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Increased surveillance and paperwork as well as repeated terrorist scares and alerts led to increased costs and lengthy delays at border crossings to the point that the car makers and many other large integrated producers were forced to abandon "just-in-time" manufacturing.

The Canadian corporate elite's anxieties over the thickening border are coupled with a series of other economic and strategic concerns. These include fears that Canada is losing influence in Washington as Canada's role in the US economy declines in relative terms and that of China, Mexico and other countries grows, and that the free trade deals Washington has struck with other countries are eroding the value of Canada's privileged access to the US market. There is also longstanding resentment that Canada has been unable to secure guaranteed access to the US market. (Neither FTA nor NAFTA exempted Canada from US Congressional oversight of trade laws.)

The development of a closer partnership with the US—including a US-led security perimeter and more explicit and binding guarantees from Canada of its role as an "all-weather" supplier of oil and other forms of energy to the US—has been touted with increasing frequency over the last decade by prominent ruling-class spokesmen and think tanks as a means of advancing the Canadian bourgeoisie's interests in a new era of economic and geopolitical upheaval.

The calculation is that the forging of a North American Security Perimeter will not only facilitate trade with the US, but that it will give Canada increased influence in Washington, and place it in a unique strategic relationship with the US.

That what is envisaged is a Fortress North America—an economic and military-strategic bloc directed against the US and Canadian bourgeoisies' overseas rivals and the working class of both countries—is bluntly spelled out in a February 2 *Globe and Mail* op-ed column authored by Colin Robertson, a former Canadian diplomat and the current vice-president of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.

"We need to take this next step," wrote Robertson, "because the gains of the free trade deals were realized a decade ago... Mr. Obama's declaration that he'll double US exports gives us our opening because the dynamics of supply chain integration means we have to be part of this equation... Our shared objectives will be to take a 'perimeter' approach to mutual security, to 'smarten up' the border, to take a blowtorch to the regulatory thicket and to strategically manage our shared environment and its resources.

"... Sticking with the status quo means continuing incremental decline. Meantime, the global express is picking up speed."

The Canadian elite—or at least its dominant faction—is determined

to convince Washington that, to use Robertson's words, "including us in the security blanket serves US national security and economic interests."

Such a strategic orientation can only add further impetus to the Canadian bourgeoisie's turn to a "more muscular" foreign policy based on the rearmament of the Canadian Armed Forces and its deployment in Afghanistan and other imperialist wars.

Significantly, Ottawa is already coming under pressure from Washington to take a leading role alongside the US in the Mexican drug wars—an operation that is being used to assert a US security presence in the impoverished but increasingly economically important country that lies directly to the south of the "dollar republic." In a speech in Toronto late last year, Admiral James Winnefeld, the head of the Pentagon's Northern Command and NORAD, publicly declared that "Canada has a future in working with [its] two American neighbours to fight a common, corrosive and growing threat to all our societies."

The proposed North American Security Perimeter is an attempt to deepen the strategic alliance between Canadian and US imperialism and it must be actively and energetically opposed by the working class from the standpoint of uniting workers in Canada, with their class brothers and sisters in the US and Mexico in a common struggle for workers' governments and the development of the Socialist United States of North America.

Such a perspective is diametrically opposed of that of sections of the Liberal Party, the social-democratic NDP, and the unions, who, under the banner of "defending Canadian sovereignty," are opposing the security perimeter talks. These forces articulate the interests of sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie who fear they will be wiped out in the event of closer economic integration with the US or who hope to maintain greater room for Canada's ruling elite to assert its own predatory interests independent of those of Washington.



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