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**Forget Al-Qaeda: Think Mexico –  
Next Great Threat to Canadian Security**

by Major Bernard Brister  
November, 2012



# POLICY PAPER

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## **Forget Al-Qaeda: Think Mexico – The Next Great Threat to Canadian Security**

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Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute  
1600, 530 – 8th Avenue S.W., Calgary, AB T2P 3S8  
[www.cdfai.org](http://www.cdfai.org)

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ISBN: 978-1-927573-05-1



Canadians and their security infrastructure have been primarily focused and occupied for much of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with countering the threat posed by the phenomenon of international terrorism. Now with that threat receding as a result of a decade-long effort by the west that has involved both success and failure, and regional socio-political upheavals such as the Arab spring, Canadians should reconsider and possibly reprioritize their security concerns for the next decade.

One result of this process of re-prioritization could be a focus on several threats posed by the anarchical environment that is increasingly dominating Mexico, a nation that has sometimes been characterized as a “failed” state and where regional politics is dominated by local entrenched strongmen who often represent families who have been powerful since colonial times. Clientilism is rife and corruption is a way of life, as shown by the effective way the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) kept power for so long.

Mexico has also been described as a state that is rapidly becoming the next Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

Mexico has moved increasingly into the North American economic sphere since the 1990s and within the security sphere since 9/11, yet to a significant degree, it remains highly distinct from its two North American partners in terms of security issues, levels of economic and social development, and political stability.<sup>2</sup> It is a nation where one’s origins and familial connections determine one’s place in the society and where the opportunities for someone to make something of oneself are severely limited by a rigid caste system.<sup>3</sup> For centuries, Mexico has been ruled by a series of corrupt regimes, many of whom originated within the aristocratic “upper crust” of approximately 300 families that between them have traditionally dominated and controlled much of Mexico’s political and economic course through history.

The result is an educational system that largely does not prepare Mexico’s youth for competitive positions in the advanced North American economy, and a social infrastructure that inhibits upward mobility through legitimate channels and processes. Further, the Mexican national infrastructure has not kept up with population growth and threatens to collapse under existing and forecasted population estimates. Lastly, nurtured by a crumbling economy and lack of economic opportunity as well as a burgeoning market for illegal narcotics in the United States, a number of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs), or cartels have established themselves as the regional engines of economic growth and have gone a long way toward supplanting the normal role and functions of government in a number of Mexican states.

In many cases advancement through corrupt means is the only realistic avenue for an enterprising individual from humble origins to get ahead, or for a member of the political and economic elite to rise higher in power and wealth.<sup>4</sup> The overall result of these realities is that in many regions of Mexico the best alternatives for those seeking to advance their own economic welfare and that of their families is to join a drug cartel or to attempt to cross into the United

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<sup>1</sup> The PRI are a center-left party that held power for 70 years from 1930 until defeated by a center-right party led by Vicente Fox in 2002. Hal Klepak, PhD and Stephen J. Randall, PhD. “Mexico: Current and Future Political, Economic and Security Trends.” Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (August 2010): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Luz E. Nagle. “Corruption of politicians, law enforcement, and the judiciary in Mexico and complicity across the border”, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21: 1 (2010): 112.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 113.



States illegally and undertake a life in the grey economy, hoping against hope that they and their families will not be caught and returned to Mexico.

The drug cartels are far more than just local organizations that coordinate the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States in return for increasing volumes of guns and money.<sup>5</sup> These organizations have international connections and relationships with countries such as Iran and terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> They have spawned secondary and tertiary criminal industries such as illegal immigration, commodities smuggling and theft, extortion and kidnapping, weapons trafficking, and street taxation, intimidation and extortion as well as a host of other activities.<sup>7</sup> There are even entirely separate organizations that specialize in various aspects of the drug trade.

One such example is “Los Zetas,” a gang organization of cartel “enforcers” that represents an amalgam of terrorists, criminals, and private armies. This organization is characterized by extensive compartmentalized networking, pervasive intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities, advanced weaponry, brutal tactics, top level military and police training, and the ability to undermine state governments and control large swaths of territory.<sup>8</sup> The extent of the corruption within the Mexican security infrastructure is such that on at least one occasion, the lure of prosperity has resulted in the *en masse* defection of at least one United States trained elite security unit to the ranks of Los Zetas to ply their trade for a new and more generous master.<sup>9</sup> The sophistication and development of Los Zetas as a non-state security threat could potentially become a significant security problem not only for Mexico, but for the United States and Canada as well.

The lure of what the cartels have to offer is such that in a society rife with corruption they control large portions of the police and judiciary and draw their personnel from a “farm team” system similar to that in use with the NHL, where Mexican youth develop their criminal skills and penchant for violence as they progress from local gangs to city or state level families that contract out to the cartels for various services and finally to the “big leagues” when they are selected for direct employment by anyone of a dozen cartels that control the flow of illegal narcotics through Mexico to the United States from South America.

But how does this affect Canadian security interests? We have little direct contact with Mexico and do not share a common border. How serious could any threat posed by Mexico be to Canadian security interests? What might be first seen as a distant phenomenon unrelated to Canadian interests however, actually turns out to be a growing problem that could have serious economic, social, political, and security implications for Canadians in the future. This is because the contemporary state of internal Mexican affairs is in fact influencing the security and welfare of Canadians in three basic ways, two of them direct and a third in an indirect but nonetheless critical fashion.

The first way in which Mexican affairs are influencing Canadian security and welfare is through immigration. Convinced that the domestic economic situation within Mexico is irreversible

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the organizations include “enforcer” organizations such as; Los Zetas, the Mexican Mafia (La Eme), and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13). Robert J. Bunker. “Strategic threat: narcos and narcotics overview”, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21: 1 2010: 8.

<sup>6</sup> Klepak, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Bunker, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Campbell. “Los Zetas: operational assessment”, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21: 1 (2010): 55.

<sup>9</sup> Klepak, 10.



and/or fearing for their lives as a result of the increasing dominance of criminal organizations in many parts of everyday Mexican life, significant numbers of Mexican citizens began making their way to Canadian ports of entry and claiming refugee status in 2005. So many did this that the government took the extraordinary step on 13 July 2009, of implementing a visa requirement for Mexican citizens travelling to Canada.<sup>10</sup>

While this has established a degree of control over the number of refugee claims, it is by no means a long term solution and is likely to become increasingly ineffective as the actions of American legislators encourage Mexicans already in the United States (illegally) to travel north to the Canadian border and establish their refugee claim in a country known both for its generosity and for the overworked and overtaxed system of immigration review and application processing.<sup>11</sup> In the interim, the influx of Mexican refugee claimants, representing 25% of the total, and 90% of which are ultimately rejected, continue to consume the already over-taxed security resources of the Canadian government and of Immigration Canada.

The second way that Mexican affairs are directly influencing Canadian security and welfare is through the flow of illegal drugs into Canada from Mexico. Although it is a relatively small problem at present when compared to the volume of product that American authorities must attempt to deal with, it is growing steadily larger.<sup>12</sup> The latest statistical data (2008) indicates that the volume of cocaine smuggled into Canada has tripled in recent years and the percentage of that increased volume entering the country through the United States has gone from 25% to 40%.<sup>13</sup> As more and more American resources are dedicated to holding back the blizzard of illegal narcotics from Mexico, the flows can be expected to adopt the path of least resistance, which in some cases may result in the drug pipeline going north to Canada before dipping south of the border. If this occurs, one would anticipate that thereafter would follow the inevitable

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<sup>10</sup> Refugee claims from Mexico have almost tripled since 2005, making it the number one source country for claims. In 2008, more than 9,400 claims filed in Canada came from Mexican nationals, representing 25% of all claims received. Of the Mexican claims reviewed and finalized in 2008 by the Immigration and Refugee Board, an independent administrative tribunal, only 11% were accepted. Citizenship and Immigration Canada: "Canada Imposes a Visa on Mexico," Ottawa, July 13, 2009. Located at: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2009/2009-07-13.asp> Accessed: 10 November 2011.

<sup>11</sup> By way of example, at least two states, Arizona and South Carolina, now require their police to determine whether or not a person is lawfully in the US if they have reasonable suspicion that they are not. Located: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-11-09/mexico-joins-u-s-court-challenge-against-south-carolina-s-immigration-law.html> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html> Accessed: 10 November 2011.

<sup>12</sup> About 40% of the seized cocaine intended for Canadian markets either transited or was intended to transit the United States. Cocaine enters both countries by a variety of routes originating in South America. The amount of cocaine destined for Canada seized by Canadian authorities at the US-Canada border from 2004 to 2006 (1.6 tons) more than tripled the amount seized between 2001 and 2003 (496 kilograms). During the three-year period of 2004 to 2006, Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) seized 4.1 tons of cocaine at all ports of entry compared to 3.3 tons from 2001 to 2003; an increase of 24%. Consignments can transit one or more countries prior to entering Canada. The United States, the predominant country of transit for cocaine smuggled into Canada, accounted for 1.6 tons (40%) of the total amount smuggled during this period. Canadian reports indicate that polydrug shipments of Canadian-produced Ecstasy and marijuana are exchanged for cocaine, currency, and occasionally firearms that are to be transported back into Canada. United States/Canada. United States-Canada Border Drug Threat Assessment 2007. (DEA- 08005 March 2008): p. vii-5.

<sup>13</sup> The primary conduit for the conduct of the smuggling operations are well organized Asian gangs on the Canadian side of the border. The forecast is for cocaine smuggling operations to increase in both volume and sophistication in the future. The Department of Public Safety. "Canada-United States Border Drug Assessment" Located: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/le/bs/uscabdta-eng.aspx#a07> Accessed: 10 November 2011. See also "United States-Canada Border Drug Threat Assessment," Located: [http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/le/oc/\\_fl/us-canadian-report-drugs-eng.pdf](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/le/oc/_fl/us-canadian-report-drugs-eng.pdf) Accessed: 10 November 2011.



destabilizing effect on our society that results from the presence of highly-organized, extremely lucrative and ultra-violent criminal activity.<sup>14</sup> This could include, but not be restricted to, the terrorizing and infiltration of the police and judiciary and be accompanied by elevated levels of violence with the associated loss of the domestic public's confidence in government at all levels to carry out its primary responsibility – ensuring the safety of the country's citizens.<sup>15</sup>

The third and possibly greatest effect that the current domestic instability in Mexico is having upon the security and welfare of Canadians is an indirect one by virtue of the negative effects that it is having upon the Canada-United States security relationship. In this regard there are two primary effects. The first is a continuing one of increased thickening of the border as successive American administrations seek to “fire-proof” their citizens from the triple threat of illegal immigration, the importation of increasing amounts of illegal narcotics, and terrorist attack.<sup>16</sup> This process of thickening has been a contributing factor in the steady reduction of trade between Canada and the United States. Trade with the United States has been in a steady decline since 2005, having decreased almost 20% in the last 5 years. For a country like Canada whose main security interest is primarily economic in nature, this statistic is very disturbing and worthy of some concern.

The other direct effect that the ongoing instability in Mexico is having upon the Canada-United States relationship is a continuing attempt by a number of American factions to conflate essentially dissimilar issues occurring on their northern and southern borders. Although clearly motivated by political considerations, the comments of the Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, that the threats emanating from the northern and southern border regions were such that they could be addressed with a single policy are an example of this tendency. To put the Secretary's comments into perspective however, she also stated that the 9/11 terrorists entered the United States through Canada.

These attempts have manifested themselves in a campaign to establish an ever-closer trilateral relationship that theoretically will efficiently and effectively address North American security issues. While there do not appear to be any advantages in this process for Canada, the trilateral approach is a concept that clearly simplifies the resolution of border security issues for the United States – or at least theoretically because in order for it to effectively do so the security issues on both borders must be similar in causality, size, type, and nature and this is not the case.<sup>17</sup> The reality is that the border issues presented by Canada and Mexico bring different

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<sup>14</sup> Narcotics and the drug trade contribute to a range of social ills. Among these are social instability, violence, corruption, and a weakening of the state. John P. Sullivan, “Counter-supply and counter-violence approaches to narcotics trafficking”, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21: 1(2010): 179.

<sup>15</sup> Graham H. Turbiville Jr. “Firefights, raids, and assassinations: tactical forms of cartel violence and their underpinnings”, in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 21: 1, 2010: 123.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Harvey speaks of an addiction of the American public to security where the more they have, the more they want and the greater the penalty imposed upon an incumbent administration if failure occurs. Politicians and government agencies are therefore faced with the decision to spend increasing amounts of tax dollars on security or be accused of not doing everything possible to safeguard the American people should an attack be successfully perpetrated. Few bureaucrats or politicians appear willing to take this risk with the consequence that the Canada-United States border has experienced a gradual but steady process of thickening particularly since 2005. Frank P. Harvey. “Smoke and Mirrors: Globalized Terrorism and the Illusion of Multilateral Security.” (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> An example of this is that in 2005 of the 1.2 million improperly documented persons intercepted attempting to enter the United States, fewer than 10,000 came from Canada and of those, and the majority consisted of irregularities in documentation as opposed to attempts to flee across the border undetected. Application of the same filters and security screening processes on both borders would clearly result in a waste of precious security resources



political, security and trade concerns to the American table. The countries (Mexico and Canada) are different, some of the problems may be similar, but differing circumstances mean that the solutions are likely different as well, with the danger for Canada being the conflation in the American mind of somewhat similar problems with dissimilar solutions.<sup>18</sup>

There are several advantages that accrue to the United States as a result of dealing with issues trilaterally instead of bilaterally. One of the most important factors is that when Canada is included with Mexico by the United States in consideration of any issue, there is the likelihood of America adopting the Napolitano solution and attempting to resolve essentially different Canadian and Mexican issues with a single blanket policy.<sup>19</sup> The attraction and advantage for American legislators and government officials in this regard is threefold.

First, in the absence of real knowledge of both border situations and circumstances, it is intellectually neater to have one policy for all land borders. Second, if a solution is applied to the Canadian as well as the Mexican border, American legislators cannot be accused by their domestic constituencies of having separate racially-based policies for their border regions. Branding Canada as a threat facilitates this process. By applying a single measure that might be targeted at a southern problem to both borders they acquire domestic political cover for policies that are essentially aimed at their southern boundary.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, the inclusion of Canada in the discussion/negotiating process carried on between Mexico and the United States circumvents some historical American difficulties in dealing with Mexico directly – Canada can and does serve as interlocutor on issues that America has been unable to effectively address bilaterally with Mexico.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the benefits to America, there are advantages to Mexico of entering a trilateral security relationship with Canada and the United States. First, there is a rather nebulous benefit to be gained by being able to join with Canada in opposing an American initiative or policy proposal using the logic that the influence of Canada combined with that of Mexico may bring about flexibility in American policy-makers not present in a strictly bilateral circumstance. The real value or utility of this rationale however is doubtful and has yet to be tested.

Another benefit to Mexico of a trilateral relationship might be that the American policy that is formulated so that it applies to both Canadian and Mexican circumstances on an issue may be a more moderate one than if it were negotiated based upon Mexican circumstances alone. Thus the inclusion of the Canadian case would benefit Mexico by virtue of having a moderating effect on what might otherwise be a harsher bilateral policy.

Notwithstanding these apparent advantages to Mexico, the Mexican authorities have demonstrated a consistent lack of interest in the establishment of closer security ties with the United States. This could be a result of concerns over their sovereignty. Having been physically invaded twice and roughly handled politically and militarily on several other occasions, the

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and a further unnecessary thickening of the border that will further retard the cross-border economic flows. Canadian Ally Located: <http://www.canadianally.com/ca/canadasimm>

<sup>18</sup> Michael Hart. Comments at the CIC Conference entitled, “The Future of the Canada-United States Relationship.” Victoria, 12 May 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Senior Official “A”, Canada Command. Ottawa, 20 July, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Senior Official “B” National Security Policy Directorate. Ottawa, 21 July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Senior Official “C”.



Mexican public and their leadership appears to be very sensitive regarding the development of a closer security relationship.

Having identified a number of advantages to a trilateral relationship for the United States and Mexico, one is hard-pressed to do the same for the Canadians. One possible advantage that could be put forward by Canadian nationalists would be a variation of one just mentioned for Mexico. That with Canada and Mexico opposing an American initiative or policy there would be the mistaken belief that American authority and influence upon the relationship as a whole would be weakened and Canadian interests would be better served in the process. The reality is that the last vestiges of special consideration and a special security relationship between Canada and the United States would likely disappear as Canada and Mexico were lumped into the same security strategy envelope, with the specific security interests of neither state being directly addressed.

With Mexico in the relationship, Canada could be used by the United States as additional support for its views as is already the case with its membership in the Organization of American States (OAS). America could prevail upon Canadians to go and talk to the Mexicans to bring them around to the shared Canada-United States perspective on issues that Canada and the United States agree upon. It can use the Mexicans in the same way against the Canadians on issues upon which the Mexicans and the Americans agree. The United States would be able to use both Canada and Mexico against each other, but refuse to yield when the two junior partners are united against an American position.

The effect would essentially be one of a significant reduction in the Canadian “room to manoeuvre” within the Canada-United States relationship. The added complexity of a third party and issues in the institutions of the existing bilateral relationship would reduce the speed and effectiveness with which common Canada-United States issues and interests could be addressed at every level of the relationship. The differences between Canada and Mexico in the levels of trust between agencies, governance capabilities, and the specifics of the issues to be dealt with as they pertain to the United States, would all complicate the relationship and reduce the precision with which Canada could employ its established policy threads in pursuit of quintessentially Canadian interests.<sup>22</sup>

Considering the net advantages and disadvantages for each potential partner, the only clear winner in a tripartite continental security structure may well be its only supporter, the United States. The Americans, as the dominant partner, would likely set the agenda and play one partner off against the other to achieve their ends, with the result a reluctant Canada and a hesitant Mexico being dragged down the path of American security policy and interests.

Thus Canadian security nationalists and the smaller anti-American faction within that group may actually be furthering the American agenda and hindering their own greater say in continental security issues, enhanced sovereignty and security policy independence by supporting the inclusion of Mexico in a continental security structure. The reality may well be

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<sup>22</sup> Attempting to address the Mexican issues of violence, drug cartels and human smuggling using procedures in place on the Canadian border would be ineffective and imposing measures taken on the Mexican border to address security and trade issues (prohibition of cross-border trucking) would prove disastrous for both countries. Centre for International Governance Innovation. “Respecting NAFTA: Cross-border Trucking.” Portal for North America. 19 March 2009. <http://portalfornorthamerica.org/spotlight/2009/03/respecting-nafta-cross-border-trucking>; “US hurts itself by prohibiting Mexican trucks.” Arizona Daily Star. March 20, 2009.



that the interests of both Mexico and Canada would be best served by the pursuit of independent bilateral security relations with the United States.

With an American tendency to sculpt a policy based upon worst case scenarios, the Canadian objective is often to avoid having the American “lowest common denominator” solution applied to the Canadian case.<sup>23</sup> A restrictive policy that addresses a quintessentially Mexican circumstance could have no relevance on the Canada-United States border and could indeed have an inhibiting effect on our trade and/or security relationship. The application of a single policy in a trilateral forum may well have advantages for both the United States and Mexico but it is unlikely to have any real benefits for Canada. Canadian interests would thus be best served by pursuing issues with the United States and Mexico, bilaterally. If the issues are the same, then the two countries can compare notes, but Canada should avoid trilateral engagement whenever and wherever possible.<sup>24</sup>

Somewhat curiously however, there is generally no political appetite among the security professionals of any of the three states involved for the conflation of issues or policies. Perhaps surprisingly, the assessment of the major benefactor of such a relationship, the United States, is that the formal and structured inclusion of Mexico in a North American trilateral security partnership is not yet advisable given the different stages and directions of development that exist at the moment between the Mexican political and security infrastructure and that of the United States.<sup>25</sup>

The implications of this reality for the establishment of a North American security perimeter in the near future are uncertain. If the political leadership of Canada, Mexico and the United States are prepared to force the implementation of a true continental security perimeter with common measures and policies for all, the diversity of security interests and priorities between the three states combined with their differing security capabilities may well force the level of security and cooperation down to an unacceptably low level for one or more of the partners.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the harmonization of social, cultural, economic, and hard security policies among the three states might well require a degree of domestic public support impossible to achieve in one or more of the partners. This may be particularly so as it is likely that the majority of the accommodation and change would likely be borne by the junior partners to bring their policies into line with the United States.

Nonetheless, the inclusion of Mexico in the continental security matrix does appear to be a long term objective for the Americans and as such it should be a long term concern for Canada. In the interim however, and regardless of how much Canadians wish to be considered separately from Mexico on many security issues, the reality is that an American problem on their southern border will inevitably influence the thickness and permeability of their northern border if Canada does not actively engage both the Americans and the Mexicans on the issue.<sup>27</sup> Thus as much as Ottawa would like to avoid becoming embroiled in United States-Mexico issues,

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<sup>23</sup> Senior Official “C”.

<sup>24</sup> Hart. Comments at the CIC Conference, Victoria, 12 May 2008.

<sup>25</sup> When it does begin to unfold however it will likely do so slowly and gradually with possibly an initial presence in the J5 Plans staff of Northcom. Senior Official “D” Assigned to NORTHCOM. Colorado Springs: 24 May 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Reconciliation of the American focus on threats from without, the Mexican one of internal security and stability, and the Canadian one of economic security may prove an impossible objective for the leaders of the three countries to achieve.

<sup>27</sup> Senior Official “C”.



Canadians have a vested interest in the resolution of Mexican security and economic issues as they pertain to their American neighbour.<sup>28</sup>

Having identified some of the potential threats and pitfalls associated with the contemporary state of internal Mexican affairs and the American desire for a closer continental security relationship, one should now consider the Canadian alternatives in dealing with these circumstances. First, one option that cannot be adopted is a “head in the sand” attempt to ignore the situation and do nothing. The only outcome resulting from this course of action will be Canadian irrelevance in the decision-making process and ultimately the imposition of an American border security regime upon the Canadian public.

Historically Canadians have always done well in their interactions with their American neighbours. In part this is due to the generosity of the American spirit towards a country that they see as a mirror of their own in many ways. In other cases it is because what is seen as a small concession by the Americans over the course of the negotiating process is seen as a much larger benefit to Canada when disparities in the size of our nations are considered. But most importantly, Canadians have always done particularly well with America whenever they have pursued a course of action involving the potent combination of informed and pro-active engagement with demonstrations of bald-faced intransigence when and as required.<sup>29</sup> Thus the bold pursuit of Canadian interests with both the Americans and Mexicans promises to be a winning strategy in the circumstances.

A strategy of informed and pro-active engagement will require the quintessential “whole of government” approach internally and a process that others have called, “trilateral bilateralism” externally.<sup>30</sup> This external process is where issues that primarily concern two of the states are pursued bilaterally and those few instances of truly trilateral concern are addressed with all three partners in consultation. Thus the situation in addressing any given issue may well be one that involves paraphrasing MacKenzie King’s well known saying, “trilateralism if necessary, but not necessarily trilateralism.”

The exact nature of the internal strategy could follow a variety of courses, each one in keeping with well-established Canadian government policy on hemispheric engagement and the pursuit of national security objectives.<sup>31</sup> Prior to examining some of the possible components of such a strategy however, it is important to clearly identify the specific goals, objectives, and specific outcomes of a Canadian strategy to address the instability in the southern part of the continent.

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<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding differences in the security situation and perceptions thereof between America’s northern border with Canada and its southern border with Mexico, events along one border will inevitably have a sympathetic effect on the other. Senior Official “D” Assigned to NORTHCOM. Colorado Springs: 24 May 2006.

<sup>29</sup> This winning strategy has worked for us on several occasions to include the negotiation of war production-sharing in World War II that established Canada as a global industrialised power and then in the extended process of negotiating the FTA in the latter part of the last century.

<sup>30</sup> John Manley and Gordon Giffin. “Bilateral Trilateralism,” in *Canada Among Nations 2009-2010: As Others See Us*. Fen Osler Hampson and Paul Heinbecker eds. (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010): 39.

<sup>31</sup> Current Canadian foreign policy priorities include the following: the requirement to advance cooperation on security in the Americas, in particular with Mexico, Central America and Haiti. Priority commitments in this regard include; the coordination of the whole-of-government effort in Central America and Mexico to address security threats and institutional deficiencies using capacity-building expertise to support government and non-government institutions and collaboration with the United States, Mexico and Latin American partners to enhance security and build capacity in Central America. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Located:

[http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a\\_propos/priorities-priorites.aspx?view=d](http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a_propos/priorities-priorites.aspx?view=d) Accessed: 10 November 2011.



First and foremost it should be understood that regardless of what the strategy eventually turns out to be, it will not eliminate the problems and difficulties presently being experienced by Mexico and the United States. The size and magnitude of the Canadian contribution simply will not be big enough to be a determining factor in the outcome of the struggle presently being undertaken to the south. Thus possible Canadian contributions of “blood and treasure” must be considered in the light of purely Canadian values and interests and from the perspective that in keeping with Canadian security traditions, this strategy would be yet another example of forward engagement, where the government’s primary objective is the neutralization of a growing threat before it reaches Canadian territory.

From this perspective the following list of objectives, listed in priority, could form the basis of a government strategy to address the security issues posed by instability in the southern part of the continent:

- Influence Canadian domestic security issues in the present and to prepare for possible future infiltration of the narco-culture into Canadian society in the future;
- Influence American policy on continental security;
- Influence trilateral policies on the continental relationship; and
- Influence the state of Mexican domestic security.

Generally the application of a strategy that would accomplish these objectives should involve a “whole-of-government” approach that capitalizes upon particular Canadian strengths and the synergy of a well-coordinated and executed multi-disciplinary approach to hemispheric security. Given the difficult economic environment that is forecast to continue for several years into the future, it is important that these efforts focus on established Canadian strengths such as governance, the rule of law, and the provision of low-profile but high-value security expertise. Such expertise should quite rightly be focused directly on those security interests and concerns having a direct impact upon the security and welfare of Canadians. The provision of this expertise would fit very well with established security priorities set out in the Canada First Defence Strategy; the defence of Canada, the defence of North America, and of contributing to international peace and security.<sup>32</sup>

While the exact nature and structure of the government participation in the continental security project could take many forms, it would probably follow the general shape and format of the restructured and re-aligned post-9/11 Canadian security infrastructure with Public safety in a lead coordinating role and the other participating departments capitalizing on existing relationships with their opposite numbers in the United States (and possibly Mexico). In this sense, in spite of the fact that the United States is a foreign country, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International trade would not necessarily take a leading role in the process. While their oversight would be a political if not a practical necessity, at least in terms of domestic politics, the reality of the Canada-United States security relationship is such that the two states often treat each other more like two components of a whole, rather than as separate entities. Consequently the overwhelming majority of the myriad of daily contacts between the two states at every level occur outside the realm of formal diplomacy. Of possibly greater influence and even utility, would be the inclusion of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) and its sub-component, the Military Coordination Committee (MCC). Both of the organizations are

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<sup>32</sup> Canada First Defense Strategy Located: <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/pri/first-premier/roles-eng.asp> Accessed: 10 November 2011.



tailor-made for the coordination and oversight of this type of relationship-building and have grown in the post-9/11 era, to include an increasing number of government agencies (as observers) charged with various aspects of national security.

How would such a proactive and comprehensive approach to continental security be received by the two partners in the process? One could speculate that it would be received with enthusiasm by both but for different reasons. To the extent that the Canadian contributions aligned themselves with established American strategies and measures, the United States would welcome the approach for all of the reasons provided previously and for the added benefit that it would reduce the commitment of American resources. Having Canadian participation would also provide political cover domestically and internationally with the associated positive political effects. That this type of cooperation is already under consideration by Canada and the United States is evidenced by the discussions between US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, and Canadian Minister of National Defence Peter McKay on joint military co-operation relating to continental defence, including anti-drug efforts and weapons control at their meeting in Halifax on 18 November, 2011.<sup>33</sup>

Mexico would likely welcome Canadian participation as well if only for the reason that it would reduce American participation and presence on issues of vital Mexican interests. This position is supported also by the fact that Mexican public opinion polls since 2004 have consistently put Canada at, or near, the top of the list of most popular foreign countries by both the general public and the informed elite that regularly considers Mexican foreign policy.<sup>34</sup> While the implementation of a visa requirement may have dampened this affection somewhat, a large portion of the Mexican population see Canada as a positive example of a smaller state that has successfully resisted integration with a more powerful neighbour and maintained its sovereignty in the face of sometimes daunting pressure.<sup>35</sup>

There may also be some benefits and synergies for the Mexicans in the ways that Canadians approach governance, security and judicial issues. Lastly, the Mexicans may appreciate what is often a less intrusive approach to providing assistance to our friends and allies.

There would also be several benefits to Canadian interests of adopting this strategy. First, it would put Canadians “at the table” when issues central to continental security are discussed with the result that Canadian governments would be informed and current on the thoughts and actions of their continental allies and in the best position as possible to influence their actions and decisions in those areas vital to Canadian interests. Such participation in a variety of security, governance, and judicial capacities would also provide invaluable experience and develop expertise in addressing threats and situations that while not directly affecting Canadians at present, clearly threaten to do so in the future. Along these lines, Canada would be doing what it has always done in the realm of national security, addressing the threat before it actually reaches our shores, or in this case, our borders

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<sup>33</sup> National Post. “Canada, U.S. renew commitment to F-35 stealth fighter program.” Located: <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/11/18/canada-u-s-renew-commitment-to-f-35-stealth-fighter-program/> on 18 Nov 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Andres Rozental. “A Mexican Perspective,” in *Canada Among Nations 2009-2010: As Others See Us*. Fen Osler Hampson and Paul Heinbecker eds. (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010): 74.

<sup>35</sup> Rozental, 75.



Having outlined what might be considered an ideal Canadian strategy, how does the actual conduct of the Canada-Mexico relationship compare? It would seem that the actual Canadian strategy followed by successive Canadian governments is quite close to the ideal described in the preceding paragraphs. Since establishing diplomatic relations with Mexico in 1944, Canada has built a modest but effective relationship with Mexico that in contemporary times has included the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) as the cornerstone of the trade and economic relationship. There has also been a sustained political engagement epitomized by institutionalized mechanisms such as the “Canada-Mexico Partnership” (CMP) established in 2004 to promote dealing with trade, investment and innovation; agribusiness; housing and community development; environment and forestry; human capital development; energy; and labour mobility.<sup>36</sup>

There is also a multi-track security dialogue involving annual security consultations and political-military talks that is complemented by increasing security and justice cooperation through the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program (ACCBP). Established in August 2009 to support Mexico in the fight against narco-trafficking and transnational organized crime, the ACCBP is meant to enhance the capacity of states, government entities and international organizations to prevent and respond to threats posed by transnational criminal activity. The ACCBP will invest up to \$15 million per year in ongoing support for capacity-building initiatives in the region, including Mexico.<sup>37</sup>

Current priorities for Canada-Mexico security and justice cooperation are articulated in the “Canada-Mexico Joint Action Plan,” a framework agreement endorsed by Prime Minister Harper and President Calderón during the latter’s visit to Ottawa in May, 2010. In the Plan, Canada and Mexico are committed to increasing and deepening security, defence and justice cooperation, emphasizing areas such as exchange of information, institutional strengthening and training. More than 15 bilateral instruments currently govern a wide range of Canada-Mexico security cooperation.<sup>38</sup>

Canada, through the Department of Justice, is also coordinating closely with Mexico in implementing its judicial reform, a program approved in 2008. In addition to this, government-wide security policy consultations are also held regularly, coordinated through our respective foreign ministries. First convened in 2007, the fourth round of consultations took place in December 2011 in Ottawa.

The programming work above complements a variety of existing bilateral security dialogues and cooperation activities, including annual Canada-Mexico Political-Military Talks (first held in 2006), which bring together civilian and defence experts to share information and experiences on topics like civil-military relations and peace support operations.<sup>39</sup>

In the realm of Public Safety, Canada and Mexico have cooperated in reducing and at some point hopefully eliminating the threats posed by human trafficking, cybercrime, and gun

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<sup>36</sup> Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International trade. Accessed: <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/mexico-mexique/cmp-pcm.aspx?lang=eng&view=d> Accessed: September 16, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



smuggling.<sup>40</sup> The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are the lead agency in Canada for a number of aspects of the Canada-Mexico security relationship. Their responsibilities include liaison programmes for the coordination of the counter-narcotics programmes in both countries and the provision of counter-terrorism capacity-building assistance. They also have personnel positioned in Mexico to facilitate major Canadian investigative inquiries, assist in the development and maintenance of criminal intelligence with the Mexican authorities and facilitate training and capacity-building initiatives.<sup>41</sup>

Militarily, the development of stronger defence ties with Mexico is a priority for the Department of National Defence (DND). Defence relations between Canada and Mexico have gradually grown since a Canadian Defence Attaché was first posted to Mexico in 1991. In addition to the Military Attachés in the Mexican Embassy in Ottawa, there is also a Mexican liaison officer in Canada Command that supports the relationship by engaging with Mexico to enhance regional stability and security throughout North America.<sup>42</sup>

While not a signatory to the bilateral agreement or a participant in the air defence of North America, Mexico also has observers in the North American Aerospace Defense (NORAD) organization and participates in continental security discussions similar to those conducted between Canada and the United States under the auspices of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) and the Military Coordination Committee (MCC).<sup>43</sup>

At the highest levels, continental military cooperation has recently included a trilateral meeting of North American Defence Ministers with the hope that this event will become a regular forum for trilateral defence discussions. The military staff cooperation between the two countries also includes the Canada-Mexico Political-Military Talks established in 2006 to assist in the ongoing development of defence and security relations. There are also regular Canada-Mexico Staff Talks, established in May, 2011 as a means of maintaining a strong relationship between Armed Forces.<sup>44</sup>

The operational elements of both militaries come into regular contact as well through the Military Training Assistance Program (MTAP) and the North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI). NAMSI involves a commitment to improve coordination and interoperability on North American maritime security and was most recently exercised in February of 2012 when Her Majesty's Canadian Ship Algonquin took part in an exercise off the coast of Southern California and Northern Mexico.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Canada. Public Safety Canada. Located: <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/le/cmbt-trffkng-eng.aspx#toc-02.4> and <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/media/nr/2012/nr20120910-eng.aspx> Accessed: September 16, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Canada. Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Accessed from: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ip-pi/iapd-sdaidp-eng.htm> and [http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign\\_policy/internationalcrime-old/CTCB-en.asp](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/foreign_policy/internationalcrime-old/CTCB-en.asp) and <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ip-pi/iob-soi-eng.htm> Accessed: September 16, 2012

<sup>42</sup> Canada. Canada Command. Accessed from: <http://www.canadacom.forces.gc.ca/nr-sp/bg-do/12.001-cc-eng.asp> Accessed: September 16, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Canada. Department of National Defence. Located: <http://www.index.forces.gc.ca/NorconexStatsLog.aspx?lu=http%3a%2f%2fwww.cfc.forces.gc.ca%2f259%2f290%2f293%2f287%2fmatson.pdf&pi=4&di=34&UsrQue=mexico&Suuid=1347817665112-xmfz4055uzyjhguhv5bwwq2k-49501&act=view> Accessed September 16, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Canada. Department of National Defence. Located: <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?id=412> Accessed: September 16, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Canada. Royal Canadian Navy. Located: [http://www.navy.forces.gc.ca/algonquin/2/2-s\\_eng.asp?category=603&title=4876](http://www.navy.forces.gc.ca/algonquin/2/2-s_eng.asp?category=603&title=4876) Accessed September 16, 2012.



As can be seen from the forgoing examples, the Canada-Mexico bilateral relationship is both healthy and robust and is augmented by trilateral inputs and consultations when and where trilateralism is seen to be of advantage to Canadian interests and as such, might be considered to be optimal in its present form.

Mexico has been assessed as a failing state by some, languishing under a deeply entrenched system of political corruption that undermines the three branches of government and compromises Mexico's law enforcement and national security capabilities. There is a culture of corruption that pervades the state and frustrates the rule of law in Mexico. The political elites, the judiciary, and police officials embrace corruption as a primary means for career advancement and for acquiring personal wealth. Mexico appears to many as a country overwhelmed by a system of government and commerce that has grown dependent on corruption in order to function. It may well take a massive breakdown and reordering of Mexican society to free Mexico from corruption's stranglehold. But the individuals who have the capacity to lead such a drastic reform are the same individuals who would have the most to lose from doing so.<sup>46</sup>

The American strategy has not so far been successful in reducing this threat to their southern border and their citizens nation-wide in spite of the dedication of massive volumes of funds, resources and manpower. The result is a growing likelihood that the crisis presently building in the southern part of the North American continent will increasingly influence Canadian interests in the realms of security, economics, and social welfare.

While the threat posed by international terrorism remains a real one, it is in decline and no longer warrants the unwavering attention of the Canadian security infrastructure or that of the government of Canada. Rather, attention must now be paid to a threat that has been developing closer to home while the Canadian focus has been further afield. The most effective Canadian strategy to address this evolving threat is a proactive one of engagement with the continental partners that, while proceeding in accordance with Canadian values and desires to help others, addresses the specific goals and objectives in the priority stated in the preceding paragraphs. The informed and proactive engagement of both American and Mexican authorities on either a bilateral or trilateral basis should be decided by the specifics of each situation and circumstance.

Failure to recognize this looming threat to Canadian security and welfare and/or failure to aggressively pursue Canadian interests in issues of continental security will doom Canada to the progressive infiltration of the narco-culture into every aspect of Canadian society. Internationally, it will put Canada in a reactive posture where Canadian citizens are forced to accept American solutions to Canadian concerns or the application to Canada of policies focused upon security issues that exist only on the southern border. The existing Canadian strategy of selective engagement with Mexican and/or American agencies should continue to be pursued and proactively expanded upon when and as the need arises to maximize Canadian interests on the continent.

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<sup>46</sup> Nagle, 112.

## ► **About the Author**

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