

Land Threats to North America and the Role of the Army

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I have been asked to give my thoughts on the impact on Canadian sovereignty of a new Canadian/American defence relationship, and to do so in the context of land threats to North America. I have chosen to look at the role of the army in addressing these threats. Approaching this topic, the question that immediately comes to mind is what is the nature of the land threat to North America today? The answer to that question helps point us in the right direction when it comes to examining what role land forces may have in responding to this threat, how this might be done in cooperation with the United States, and what impact such arrangements would likely have on Canadian sovereignty.

Reports by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)¹ and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)² are perhaps the best place to start when examining the land threat to North America. In March 2002 George Tenet, the director of the CIA, testified before Congress that the most immediate and serious threat to the United States remains international terrorism. The CIA assesses that Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups will continue to plan to attack the United States. Similarly, the CSIS public report published in June 2002 concludes that the threat of another terrorist attack by Islamic extremists or other like-minded groups on North America has not diminished. A senior Canadian intelligence agent is reported to have stated that when it comes to Canada “the threat is real, it’s immediate, it’s here.”³

The September 11th attacks suggest that terrorists will continue to use conventional weapons, and the potential for a physical attack against North America’s critical infrastructures is a key area of focus for both the CIA and CSIS. But perhaps their greatest concern is that the ‘next’ international terrorist attack on North American territory will involve weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—that is, chemical, biological, radiological or even nuclear weapons.

To a lesser degree Canada is confronted by domestic terrorism, as is the United States, but it is terrorism from international sources that is of greatest concern. Both the CIA and CSIS reports highlight the overseas dimension of the land threat to North America. The CIA draws attention to places like Somalia where the absence of a national government has created an environment where terrorists can find an operational base. CSIS notes that many of Canada’s security preoccupations originate abroad, making it imperative to identify and understand overseas developments that could become ‘homeland issues’ for Canada.

This brief discussion of land threats to North America reveals at least three things: first, the threat is primarily, if not exclusively, from individual terrorists and not from states. This is distinct from, say, the air threat to North America which could originate from a state actor in the form of a rogue state ballistic missile strike. Second, the land threat to North America can be characterized as ‘doubly asymmetric’ in that it potentially involves both unconventional parties (terrorists) and unconventional means (weapons of mass destruction). And third, although there is a notable domestic terrorism aspect—highlighted all too well in Oklahoma City in 1995—the primary origin of land threats to North America is to be found overseas. Understanding these three aspects of the land threat to North America helps point us in the right direction when it comes to examining what role land forces may have in responding to the threat.

The first point I mentioned is that the land threat is primarily from individual terrorists. In terms of a response, what we are talking about here is the control of individuals as they cross the Canada-U.S. border, or as they disembark ships on the North American coast or airplanes at any number of international airports on North American soil. We are also talking about the need for intelligence on potential terrorists that may already be in North America.

Both the 'border control' aspect of the land threat to North America, and the intelligence dimension, lend themselves not so much to a military response as to robust and well-resourced civilian agencies. Customs, border and immigration officials are on the front line of this war, as are the intelligence gathering organizations. In this context it is not surprising that in Canada's first post-September 11th budget, released in December 2001, the Canadian government announced significantly increased funding over the next five years for border security, the screening of immigrants, and CSIS (\$C7.7 billion, less \$C1.2 billion for the Canadian Forces). Similarly, border security and intelligence agencies are the big winners in America's \$38 billion domestic security budget for 2003.

It is also in these areas that national efforts in Canada and the United States, and cooperative initiatives between the two countries, have moved forward most quickly. In the months after the attacks Canada tightened immigration and refugee policies and reassigned some 2,000 RCMP officers to antiterrorism and patrol missions along the border.⁴ It passed into law a new Anti-terrorism Act and started drawing up a new Public Safety Act. The United States set up a new Office of Homeland Security and is now in the process of establishing the parameters of a new Department of Homeland Security. In terms of cooperative measures, last December Canada and the United States signed a declaration for a Smart Border initiative to increase border security while facilitating the flow of legitimate traffic. On the intelligence side, CSIS and the CIA, and the RCMP and the FBI, have increased their intelligence sharing activities to monitor potential threats.

Thus there is a lot going on in, and a lot of money being spent on, the civilian component of defending North America, otherwise known as homeland security. This is because the nature of the land threat to North America—the fact that it comes from clandestine individuals rather than formed state units—is such that it primarily demands a civilian response. In so far as there has been a military response, it has been of short-term duration and in support of civilian agencies. For example, in February 2002 the United States dispatched about 1600 National Guard troops to assist immigration, customs and border patrol agencies in their duties along the Canada-U.S. border. This is meant to be a temporary measure.

The second point I mentioned earlier is that the land threat to North America potentially involves weapons of mass destruction. This aspect of the threat, too, demands a primarily civilian response. In the event of a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction, the first line of defence would be the nation's 'first responders'—local police and fire department personnel trained as hazardous material experts, along with ambulance drivers, doctors and nurses. They would work with those federal agencies charged with 'consequence management'—the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States and the Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness in Canada.

But the character of this component of the threat is such that there would also be a significant role for the military. For many years the Canadian and American armed forces have been trained to deal with weapons of mass destruction in an overseas environment. The Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons School at Canadian Forces Base Borden, for example, dates from the Cold War, long before it was ever expected that such expertise would be needed at

home. It only makes sense that the military's skills in this area be utilized in the event of a terrorist attack on North American soil that involves WMD.

Both the Canadian and American militaries have developed units that can be called out to assist civilian authorities if necessary. The Canadian Forces' Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Response Team is designed so that it can work with the RCMP in responding to terrorist incidents involving the use of weapons of mass destruction. Joint Task Force 2 is also trained to operate in a WMD-contaminated environment. On the American side, in 1999 Joint Forces Command created a Joint Task Force – Civil Support to provide command and control of military forces in support of a designated lead agency. It is this task force that is now being transferred to Northern Command.

The nature of their expertise lends the U.S. and Canadian armies to a greater role in responding to a land threat to North America when it involves weapons of mass destruction, than when it more strictly pertains to a border, customs or immigration issue. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the military should be taking on lead agency status for these missions. In creating Northern Command the Pentagon leadership has been consistently explicit that no new missions or roles are being created for the Department of Defense,⁵ and that in all cases where Northern Command's forces operate inside the United States they are to be in support of civilian agencies.⁶

This has not stopped a substantial debate within the United States as to whether the role of the military in homeland security should be increased. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, first raised the question in his confirmation hearings a year ago.⁷ Since that time, some members of Congress have pressed for a greater military role in homeland security, particularly on the part of the National Guard, which has historically been trained and equipped as a strategic reserve for overseas combat. This summer, for example, there were calls for thousands of National Guard troops to be stationed on U.S. borders.⁸ Doing so would necessarily involve changes to Civil War-era legislation, the Posse Comitatus Act, which bars the military from a domestic law enforcement role. General Ralph Eberhart, who will take command of Northern Command in October, has said he would favor changes in existing law that would give greater domestic powers to the military to protect the United States against terrorist attack.⁹ And the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, released by U.S. President George Bush in July, calls for a thorough review of laws permitting the military to act within the United States to determine whether there should be greater military involvement.¹⁰

The question of the role of the military in homeland security is not generating the same degree of debate in Canada. With the increased continental focus one might expect calls for the militia or army reserve to play a greater role in homeland defence, much as former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker assigned civil defence and 'national survival' duties to the militia in the late 1950s.¹¹ But this idea has not been seriously revisited. The first public report on Land Force Reserve Restructure, presented by the Honorable John Fraser to the Minister of National Defence in February 2002, confirms that national mobilization is the primary mission of the reserves. There is some discussion of using the militia in "non-traditional roles," which may include domestic NBC defence, critical infrastructure protection, and disaster reaction and relief.¹² But, generally speaking, any debate over the role of the army reserves centres on the extent to which they should be used to augment regular force units on peace support operations.

A second document, *Advancing With Purpose: The Army Strategy* released in May 2002 by the Commander Land Force Command, Lieutenant-General Mike Jeffery, includes as a five-year target the introduction of new capabilities relevant to homeland defence and asymmetric

threats. It notes that critical infrastructure protection has been recently added as a defence mission, and that prevention and timely response to terrorist attack may lead to new Regular Force and Reserve roles and missions. Overall, however, the strategy has a strong expeditionary focus and looks to increasing the Army's ability to take part in overseas missions.

The unsettled question of the role of U.S. land forces in homeland security is inevitably having an impact on our understanding of future cooperative efforts between the Canadian and American armies in territorial defence. The Canada-U.S. Basic Security Document and its associated Combined Defence Plan provides for the coordinated use of both countries' land forces in the event of an attack on North America. These documents have their genesis in Canada-U.S. defence cooperation during World War Two. But North America's geographical situation—the fact that there are no viable land routes for attack—has meant that the Canadian and American armies have never needed to formalize the land defence of the continent. Cooperative arrangements have focused on training opportunities, including access to training facilities and the temporary exchange of small land force units for training purposes.¹³

A High Level Working Group of Canadian and American defence and foreign affairs officials is currently engaged in informal discussions on how Canada and the United States can better cooperate to enhance continental security and defence. The discussions do not involve Canada 'joining' Northern Command per se since this, like the other nine Unified Commands, is a solely American operation. Rather, given that the Canadian and American air forces already cooperate in the context of NORAD, the group has been focusing on how the two countries can increase North American security from a maritime and land perspective.¹⁴

Here the bottom line must be how best to protect Americans and Canadians from terrorist attack. "Protection" in turn, has two elements: prevention and response. Prevention, in my view, falls primarily in the civilian realm when it comes to the land threat to North America. The nature of the threat is such that it primarily demands more diligent and better resourced border, customs, immigration and intelligence officials. It may make sense for thousands of National Guard troops to be deployed along the U.S. border, but only in the short term until such time as more civilian agents can be recruited and trained. September 11th happened not because North American armies did not have a greater role in homeland security. Rather, it happened because of miscommunication and a perhaps a lack of resources among various civilian agencies.

In terms of response, the Canadian Forces has a well-established role with respect to aid of the civil power, as does the National Guard in the United States. But since the military would likely play a substantial part in responding to a terrorist incident involving weapons of mass destruction, it would be beneficial for the Canadian and American militaries to step up cooperation in this area. Specialized Canadian army units should conduct joint training exercises with units associated with the Joint Task Force - Civil Support. The exercises should focus on joint Canada-U.S. responses to scenarios involving a WMD attack on North American soil. This cooperative endeavor should not involve, in my view, a NORAD-like arrangement with a formalized command structure and assigned forces. Rather, it should focus on the ability of self-contained Canadian and American military response units to work together and coordinate their activity in a WMD environment.

The third point I mentioned earlier about the nature of the land threat to North America is that the primary origin of such threats is to be found overseas. This aspect of the threat calls for a significant role for land forces in at least two broad areas: warfighting and peacebuilding. The warfighting role demands land forces that are more rapidly mobile and deployable than their Cold War counterparts, and yet are still highly lethal. While the overall size of armies should not

decrease, their component units need to be smaller and equipped with lighter platforms armed with precision firepower. In Afghanistan a particular emphasis has been placed on special operations forces, however, in future conflicts armies that have transformed themselves in accordance with the new requirements will play a greater role. In 1999 the United States Army launched a major transformation effort that is to be complete by about 2010. The Canadian army's new strategy document is also in line with the requirements of future warfare. The measures it plans to take should enable it to make a meaningful contribution to coalition—and often U.S.-led—military operations.

A second broad and increasing role for the army is peacebuilding. Failed states create an environment where terrorists can establish a base of operations to inflict harm on North America. Countries such as Afghanistan, where terrorists have been forcibly rooted out, continue to provide a security threat to the Western world until such time as they are reconstructed and stable. This would similarly be the case if military force were to be used to remove the regime in Iraq. The warfighting aspect of addressing the land threat to North America is therefore only the tip of a very large iceberg that is likely to reveal an extended period of post-conflict peacebuilding. Here again, Canadian participation would likely be as part of a coalition, perhaps led by a non-U.S. major power like Britain or France. Although civilian agencies would play a key role, ground forces would be needed to provide the secure environment in which these organizations can do their work. It is for this reason that I argue ground forces should not be reduced in overall size; rather their component units should simply be made more modular.

The nature of the land threat to North America, the likely role of land forces in addressing it, and any resultant cooperative efforts between Canada and the United States, are such that they are unlikely to impact on Canadian sovereignty. The threat involves terrorists and weapons of mass destruction and has an important overseas dimension. Primary responsibility for addressing the first component of the threat should remain in civilian hands. Concerns could be raised if, for example, Canada finds it imperative to adopt border policies that are in line with those of the United States in order to secure cross-border trade. But sovereignty means 'the power to choose' and this would still be a choice that Canada would make.

Civilian agencies should also remain in the lead when addressing the threat of weapons of mass destruction. But the nature of this component of the land threat to North America is such that there would likely be significant military involvement. Cooperation between the Canadian and U.S. militaries in this area should be stepped up and would best focus on joint training exercises. Such measures would not impact on Canadian sovereignty; the two countries have well-established guidelines and procedures governing joint military training. As for the overseas dimension Canada will retain, as it has in the past, the power to choose how and whether to participate in a particular operation. In all military missions, whether at home in NORAD or abroad in NATO, the United Nations or as part of an ad hoc coalition, Canada has a long-standing tradition of relinquishing control—but never command—of its military forces.

NOTES

¹ George Tenet, "WorldwideThreat – Converging Dangers in a Post 9/11 World," Testimony Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 19 March 2002.

² Canadian Security Intelligence Service 2001 Public Report, 6 June 2002.

³ Mr. Michael Kelly, as quoted in Leonard Stern, "Canada Faces 'Real' Terrorism Threat," *National Post*, 8 March 2002.

⁴ Clifford Krauss, "Canada Alters Security Policies to Eases Concerns of U.S.," *New York Times*, 18 February 2002.

⁵ U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "Special Briefing on the Unified Command Plan," Pentagon News Transcript, 17 April 2002.

⁶ "Pentagon Realigns Military Structure," *Washington Times*, 18 April 2002.

⁷ Tom Canahuate, "Top U.S. General Says Homeland Defense Takes Center Stage," *Defense News*, 13 September 2001.

⁸ Dave Boyer, "Troops for Border Sought," *Washington Times*, 19 June 2002.

⁹ Eric Schmitt, "Wider Military Role in U.S. is Urged," *New York Times*, 21 July 2002.

¹⁰ U.S. President George Bush, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, 16 July 2002, p. 48.

¹¹ John A. Fraser, *In Service of the Nation: Canada's Citizen Soldiers for the 21st Century*, June 2000.

¹² John A. Fraser, Report to the Minister of National Defence on Land Force Reserve Restructure, February 2002.

¹³ *1994 Defence White Paper*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Lieutenant-General George MacDonald, "Canada-U.S. Defence Relations, Asymmetric Threats and the Unified Command Plan," testimony before the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, 6 May 2002. See also MacDonald's testimony before the committee on 14 August 2002.