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## U.S.-Canada Gulf Widening

Can Canada Do Anything to Stop It?

By Marcela Sanchez  
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WASHINGTON -- In the months following Sept. 11, 2001, Bush administration officials floated the idea that Canada and the United States should work to create a common front against terrorism -- a so-called "security perimeter" that would focus on protecting the North American continent.

Both then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien and his successor, Paul Martin, distanced themselves from the notion. They and other Canadian politicians worried that they would be perceived as turning over the "keys to sovereignty" on issues such as immigration, customs and border control to Washington.

Lacking Canada's cooperation, the new U.S. Department of Homeland Security went ahead and imposed on border-crossers new fees, inspections and demands for documents.

Needless to say, Canadians -- and many Americans that cross with regularity -- aren't too happy about the changes. They question the wisdom and effectiveness of such measures and decry the tightening, or "thickening," of the world's longest undefended border. The changes were a "shock to our collective system," Canada's public safety minister, Stockwell Day, said in a speech in Washington early this year.

Day was referring in particular to DHS' Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and its requirement, beginning this past January, that all air travelers arriving in the United States from Canada must show passports. Previously, both Canadians and Americans could enter with any document, such as a driver's license, deemed sufficient to demonstrate citizenship. The measure has created chaos at passport agencies on both sides of the border and, because of much confusion, has even cut down by 23 percent on the number of U.S. travelers crossing by car into Canada. Despite having to adopt some exceptions to allow people without passports to complete their travel plans, DHS is plowing ahead with plans to require passports by next summer for all travelers crossing by land or water -- 10 times as many as those who travel by air.

Public anger with the red tape and political frustration with the unilateral nature of how the border measures are imposed have prompted the government of current Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the first conservative to hold the office in more than 12 years, to step up collaborating with the U.S. on security issues. Indeed, Harper officials suggest that the perimeter idea is no longer a nonstarter.

Some observers of U.S.-Canada relations say that since 9/11, the security perimeter is being erected regardless of what Canadian officials call it. U.S. customs officials have long been posted at major Canadian airports to pre-clear passengers heading to the United States. Inspectors from both countries also work side by side in Montreal, Halifax and Vancouver, as well as in Newark and Seattle, screening cargo containers destined for U.S. or Canadian ports. And 23 binational Integrated Border Enforcement Teams

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now share information on criminal activity at the border.

Yet deeper cooperation is destined to move into more controversial territory. A task force of former officials from Canada, Mexico and the U.S. recommended two years ago the adoption of a biometric North American border pass, harmonization of visa and asylum regulations, and data sharing on foreign nationals entering and exiting the region, among other measures. No substantial action has been taken.

What's more, it's not clear how receptive Washington is to Canada's new interest in deepening cooperation, especially if officials here truly believe a new terrorist attack is imminent. Observers on both sides of the border agree that so far, DHS appears to not be particularly interested in entering into serious security negotiations with Ottawa.

DHS is wary that more Canadian involvement in security operations "will give them a chance to say no," according to Christopher Sands, Canada expert at the Hudson Institute. Sands added that U.S. officials are suspicious of Canadian intentions, thinking they would use the opportunity to delay implementation of new programs or undermine current ones.

In particular, DHS would likely reject anything it might consider a distraction from its aggressive stand on documents it deems acceptable for crossing the U.S.-Canada border. DHS has also shown that it is not eager to compromise when it comes to how information is obtained in its hunt for terrorism suspects. The department scuttled the creation of a joint immigration facility in Buffalo, N.Y., because Canadians refused to fingerprint all travelers. Canadian law forbids fingerprinting those who have no criminal charges against them.

Deeper collaboration won't exactly be easy and it is unclear what form it will take in the years ahead. Had cooperation started earlier, perhaps today, the U.S.-Canada border would look less like a gulf between mutually suspicious nations and more like a bond between neighbors.


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