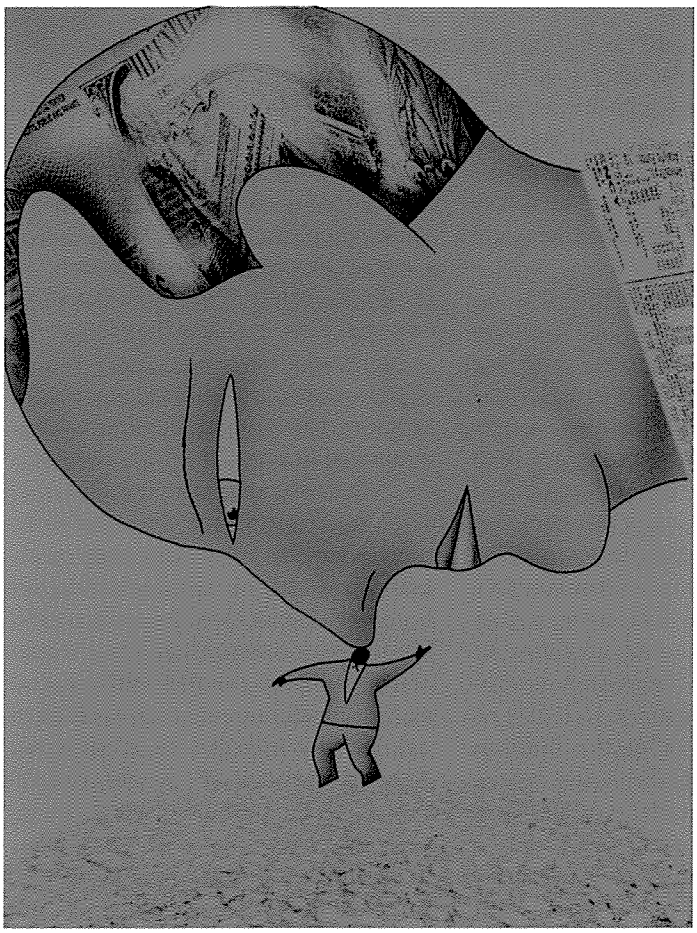
UNCLE SAM AND US ONE YEAR LATER:
The Geopolitical Consequences for Canada of September 11th

BY Stephen Clarkson



WASHINGTON'S RESPONSE TO THE STUNNING CATASTROPHE SUFFERED ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 BY THE PENTAGON AND NEW YORK'S WORLD TRADE CENTER RAISED A DOUBLE QUESTION IN CANADA ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES FOR ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS ONLY NEIGHBOUR, THE GLOBAL HEGEMON. WOULD AN OBSESSIVE AMERICAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST GLOBAL TERRORISM JEOPARDIZE WHAT *POLITICAL AUTONOMY* OTTAWA HAD MANAGED TO RETAIN UNDER NAFTA'S HEIGHTENED CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION? AND ONCE THE LIFE-AND-DEATH ISSUES OF MILITARY SECURITY HAD BEEN ADDRESSED, WHAT WOULD BE THE FALLOUT FOR CANADA'S *ECONOMIC ACCESS* TO THE WORLD'S LARGEST COMMERCIAL AND CAPITAL MARKET?

The immediate blockading of its borders and airports conjured up the prospect of a surgical severing of that Siamese twin otherwise known as the integrated Canadian-American economy, a radical operation from which the tiny twin could hardly be expected to recover. For those first hours of the trauma and the first days of shock, rational thought about an integrated continental economy was no match for the hysteria that overtook Washington about the terrorist threat facing the United States. Scenarios of a Fortress America that erected not just commercial but human fortifications along the 49th parallel and the Rio Grande sent Canadians a frightening message that, after decades of being lured into ever deeper intermingling of their economy and society, they were now faced with immediate and total exclusion, unless...

The alternative to total exclusion seemed total inclusion. The scenario competing with a Fortress America, defined narrowly as the territories of the fifty U.S. states, was a broader Fortress North America. To be brought within these continental fortifications Canada would have to accept not just common external tariffs proclaiming a customs union, but common immigration, refugee, intelligence and security policies in which it would abandon its autonomy in return for protection within the American sanctuary.

For some such as the business economist Wendy Dobson and retired historian Jack Granatstein whose proposals were published by the C.D. Howe Institute, a leading corporate think tank in Toronto, the requisite policy response to these stark alternatives was clear – and linked. To regain the secure *access* that free trade had supposedly achieved for companies exporting to the United States, Canada would have to propose a "big idea" to eliminate whatever remnants of an economic border that remained under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). At the same time, to buy off possible punishment by Washington for the Chrétien government's insufficiently supportive behaviour in the autumn of 2001, Ottawa would have to negotiate an extension of military integration under the Pentagon's control to include its navy and army units. In short, access could not be partial; it required full integration.

Others, including this writer, considered that negotiating a new bilateral economic agreement with the United States was a political non-starter in post-traumatic Washington. As for the Bush administration's plans to weaponize space and attack Iraq, Ottawa should resist rather endorse both initiatives because of their inherently counterproductive potential. It was as unlikely that the White House would exact retribution for Ottawa's non-compliance as it was repugnant to adopt such a policy reversal out of simple cowardice. This school of thought argued that Canada should develop its military capacity not to provide a northern garrison for Washington's homeland defence but to enhance the United Nations' capacity for constructive intervention in situations of social disintegration that threatened human security as in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In short, meaningful autonomy in practice required real autonomy in mind.

What differentiated the Canadian responses from other countries' reactions were the special intimacy problems generated by sharing a common border with the U.S.A. Because its 8,900 kilometres constituted the United States's longest frontier with another state, Canada presented a special internal security concern to Washington. After all, over 500,000 people cross the Canada-U.S. border's 425 crossing points each *day*. But with $1.9 billion worth of daily trade – that is, 81 per cent of Canada's exports and 71 per cent of its imports – traversing the boundary largely by truck, the same border caused Canada an acute concern about its economic security. Any measure that slowed trade simultaneously imposed a serious liability on the increasingly integrated Canadian-American economic system.

Initial responses to this double problematic veered from one extreme to another. The unruffled among Canadian analysts held that nothing had changed on September 11, except that the human calamity suffered by workers in the twin towers and the Pentagon had brought Americans into the club of the vulnerable to which the rest of the world already belonged. Those successful suicide missions were only spectacular dramatizations of globalization's dark side. Al-Qaeda's stunning coup showed that security measures and intelligence capabilities would need to be improved in Canada in close conjunction with every other state, even if it was the United States, whose immigration and intelligence failures had been demonstrated by the terrorists' freedom of movement on American soil, which needed to make the greatest changes.

Such northern cool was dismissed by alarmists in Canada when Washington caused traffic gridlock at customs posts and panic in boardrooms by temporarily closing down its northern border. According to their view, if Canada wanted to regain an open economic border with the U.S., it would have to pursue a degree of military integration with the United States even greater than what it had accepted during the Cold War. In effect, Canada would have to merge its land and sea forces within the Americans' command structure.

Such full support for the American response to Islamic terrorism came naturally to the Canadian military whose strategic and industrial integration was first defined in formal agreements during World War II and then institutionalized during the Cold War through numerous arrangements – most prominent of which was the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD, 1957). Canadian leaders became used to endorsing whatever strategic doctrine on nuclear retaliation the Pentagon might issue as it responded to new circumstances and incorporated its military-industrial complex's latest technologies.

Immediate post-catastrophe behaviour on both sides of the 49th parallel seemed to confirm that the Cold War provided the appropriate template for the Canadian-American security relationship, but it turned out to fit operations abroad better than continental defence. George W. Bush's rhetorical declaration of war against terrorism connected Canada to the state of mind that existed before the Berlin Wall came down, namely a war psychosis that rallied the forces of light against an evil, if invisible, empire. In this apocalyptic

spirit, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien immediately endorsed the Bush Doctrine and offered his armed forces for the execution of the United States's military attack against the Taliban government and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

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Ottawa's decision in early 2002 to send 750 Canadian soldiers in the Light Infantry Battle Group to be deployed in Kandahar seemed gratuitous. Questions in Parliament were raised about the troops' subordination to U.S. command causing them to violate the Geneva Convention by handing over their prisoners to the Americans who refused to concede them the rights of captured soldiers. Consternation spilled out from the House of Commons to the whole country when on the night of April 18 four Canadian soldiers on a night-time training exercise were killed by a bomb dropped on them by an American pilot mistaking them for the enemy.

In offering up the Princess Pats as sacrificial lambs to do America's dirty – and, as it turned out, deadly – work in the mopping-up phase of its high-tech bombing war, the Chrétien government had sent an unambiguous signal to Washington. Integrating its troops in the U.S. military machine gave the White House the message that Canada was fully on-side. For Ottawa's main priority was not peace in Afghanistan. It was credit with Uncle Sam in a situation starkly different from that of the Cold War. Then the threat was military, distant and external to both the hegemon and its northern neighbour, leaving their common border as a traditional inter-state barrier whose economic height was determined by tariffs and whose human height was set by immigration and tourist regulations.

In George Bush's global campaign against terrorism, no rogue, axis-of-evil state's army, navy, nor air force was credibly able to threaten North America. The threat was less from visible states than from invisible networks whose destructive capacity was cunningly embedded throughout the world's multicultural mosaic. Washington had to assume that "sleepers" continued to go about their otherwise normal daily routines anywhere, even as fully-fledged U.S. citizens professed they loved America as much as Allah.

This absence of a traditional defence problem did not prevent some Canadians, including leading figures in the armed forces, from arguing that the new realities revealed on September 11 required not just the extension of NORAD to include control of the eventual National Missile Defence system, but the full integration of Canada's navy and army within their American counterpart services.

This was a Canadian solution in search of a not-yet-existent American need. Preliminary evidence that the White House was not overly exercised about its Canadian connections could be seen in the proposed Office of Homeland Security, which was about reorganizing domestic institutions. Subsequent proof that the Pentagon was not particularly concerned with a northern threat could be seen in its Northern Command, created in April 2002 to integrate the U.S. military's four famously autonomous services within a single entity and be responsible for North American defence. If Northcom's formal mandate was only to "co-operate" with Canada and Mexico, this suggested that the reorganized American military's domestic mission was not to integrate with, let alone displace, its neighbours' armed forces.

As a possible target in its own right for al-Qaeda's retribution, Canada had in any case to look to its own defences against terrorism. Consequently Ottawa's non-military policy response to September 11 was driven both by *domestic* and by *American* demands for security against terror. Between these two pressures on Canadian policy there was some common ground and some divergence.

The domestic needs of Canadian security were not substantially different from those of governments elsewhere facing increased threat levels. With the globalization of interdependence, domestic security had become transnationalized. Canada's security perimeter now extended to every visa office, seaport and international airport, whether Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt, or Tokyo, from which dangerous weapons could be shipped or potential terrorists could arrive, presenting themselves as immigrants, refugees who had lost or destroyed their documents, or innocent-looking tourists with dollars to spend on sightseeing in the Rockies. Defence against terrorism therefore required a generalized sharing of data among intelligence services, which would use the latest technologies for trying to ferret out the dangerous, and then tracking their movements. The role of the military was secondary in this effort of trans-social sleuthing. Primary was the work of immigration, customs, intelligence and police forces co-operating globally to detect the planning, and then abort the execution of horrific sabotage.

The government of Canada's signals were mixed. Despite Chrétien instantly offering expressions of sympathy and the government's quickly organizing a mass demonstration on Parliament Hill of public solidarity with the victims, the prime minister was made to appear niggardly in his support by the cheerleader standard set by Tony Blair, his British counterpart. In suggesting that September 11 had not radically changed the parameters of the military or subversive threat posed by terrorism, he appeared to endorse positions expressed by the unruffled observers. In acting backstage with energetic enthusiasm to transform Canada's security stance, his government showed it was closer to the views of the alarmist who insisted that the acid test would be American satisfaction that Ottawa and the provinces were conforming with what Washington deemed necessary.

If U.S. government required the

complete *harmonization* of the two countries' practices and the full integration of their personnel and data-gathering, Canadian security would suffer. Since 1996 Ottawa's refugee and immigration control system had put officers in airports abroad where they had stopped more than 33,000 people with false documents before they boarded planes for Canada. As a result, immigration security in Canada was considered tougher than in the U.S., so continentalizing the insecurity that characterized American society – including the ease with which al-Qaeda's plotters could immigrate and train at flight schools – would clearly be retrograde.

Within the understandably heated debates around these issues, the American ambassador to Canada was an important voice of reasoned calm. For Paul Cellucci, the issue was gaining informed American confidence in Canadian procedures. Standards for accepting desirable immigrants and procedures for dispatching dangerous applicants could be the same, or different, as long as they were effective. A process of intense, often tense, bilateral discussions between officials took place through the autumn, with Canadian officials explaining their practices to their predictably overbearing, but frequently less knowledgeable, U.S. counterparts.

Ottawa proceeded to take measures strengthening Canada's internal counter-terrorism capacity on a wide variety of fronts, many of which implemented the country's international obligations spelled out in treaties Ottawa had helped negotiate. Some new legislation was also introduced. Bill C-36, the Anti-Terrorism Act, which became law on December 18, 2001, defined terrorist activity broadly and decreed tougher sentences for terrorism offences. A new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into force on June 28, 2002 to introduce higher penalties for immigration offences and declare violators of international human rights, members of organized crime syndicates, and other security threats ineligible for refugee status. Finance Minister Paul Martin's fall budget allocated C$7.7 billion for five years to the various terrorist control and border maintenance programs, a sum proportionately larger than the U.S. allocation to the same objectives.

Seen from the Rideau Canal, it was the government of Canada that actually set the bilateral agenda on border issues, because it had done its homework and because it was institutionally more nimble than the U.S. government. For years it had been trying to get Washington to undertake joint measures to improve border security (detecting dangerous immigrants) and increasing border efficiency (to speed the crossing of reliable cargoes while focusing on higher-risk shipments). Canada-U.S. border partnership talks had been initiated with the Clinton administration, but had not gone far. Once September 11 caused the U.S. government to focus on the issue, Ottawa had coherent plans ready to propose such as Integrated Border Enforcement Teams and fraud-resistant permanent identity cards for new immigrants.

The Canadian counterpart to former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge whom Bush appointed to co-ordinate the administration's action on homeland security was John Manley, Minister of Foreign Affairs, whom the prime minister assigned as point man on Canada-U.S. security relations after September 11. Whereas Ridge took months to get his act together, the centralization inherent in parliamentary government gave Manley immediate command over all the federal government's relevant programs and officials.

As a result, the Canadian embassy in Washington could claim that the bulk of the 30-Point Smart Border Action Plan, signed by Ridge and Manley in December, was Canadian-inspired, although the stationing of U.S. customs inspectors in major Canadian seaports that act as trans-shipment depots for cargoes heading for the United States was clearly a Washington demand. Measures announced in order to satisfy the government's two publics — its electorate at home and the hegemon in Washington — raised the perennial question of Canadian sovereignty. But if the Canadian public agreed with the Liberals in wanting the same heightened levels of security, little autonomy seemed to have been sacrificed.

Developments over twelve months had confirmed the prime minister's initial unruffled hypothesis that September 11 had not fundamentally changed Canada's security parameters. With the U.S. success in Afghanistan and the worldwide toughening of anti-terrorist surveillance having decimated al-Qaeda's capacity to wreak havoc, it had become difficult for President Bush to maintain the sense of high anxiety necessary for a permanent war psychosis. Meanwhile it had learned that, with terror-by-anthrax having domestic roots, total security was a pipe dream and that, even if its northern neighbour was disconcertingly liberal, Canada's immigration procedures were tight and its officials reliable. With trade flows across the border having largely returned to normal, the Canadian business community had backed away from such "big ideas" as dollarization through a North American currency union.

In sum, Canada was not having to look across an impassable moat at a Fortress America. Nor did it have to beg for inclusion within Fortress North America through total offering policy harmonization. In place of these extremes of exclusion or annexation, Ottawa could continue managing its crucial bilateral relationship on a pragmatic, case by case basis. And on global issues such as the International Criminal Court, which it believed crucial for promoting human security in the international system, it was not afraid to oppose Washington's position at the United Nations.

In short, if a famous American poet could insist that good fences make good neighbours, a post-September 11 Canadian response about its role in the world relative to the United States could be what it had been before 2001: good neighbours make good fences.

Stephen Clarkson professes political economy at the University of Toronto. Some of the material for this article was adapted from his new book, *Uncle Sam and Us: Globalization, Neoconservatism, and the Canadian State* (Toronto and Washington: University of Toronto and Woodrow Wilson Presses, 2002, 535 pages).