

Canada and Bush's North American Union Project

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Region: [Canada](#), [USA](#)

Global Research, August 09, 2007

thenewamericanempire.com/ 9 August
2007

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969), 34th US President, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961

"An agreement [with the U.S.] to harmonize trade, security, or defence practices would, in the end, require Canada and Mexico to ... cede to the United States power over foreign trade and investment, environmental regulation, immigration, and, to a large degree, foreign policy, and even monetary and fiscal policy."

Roy McLaren, former liberal trade minister

Look for a very strong backlash coming from the Canadian people, but also from the American and Mexican people, once they clearly understand what the Bush-Calderon-Harper trio has been concocting in near complete secrecy and with nearly no public debate whatsoever, over the last few years.

Indeed, the three relatively unpopular governments presently in charge in Washington, Ottawa and Mexico, have aligned themselves with very large corporations, most of them American owned, to lay the foundations for a new North American Union, (NAU) also called the "Deep Integration" project. This would be a new permanent alliance that would be de facto placed under American control. Canada and Mexico would have to harmonize many of their laws and regulations to suit the interests of big business and the undemocratic and imperial ambitions of the U.S. government around the world.

With such a plan for an enlarged continental integration at both the economic and political levels, we are far from the initial program of fair and free trade for goods and services and for removing barriers to trade between the three countries, as initially envisaged by the 1988 Free Trade Agreement, (FTA) between Canada and the United States. It has to be remembered that under the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canada not only accepted that Mexico be incorporated into the North American free trade zone, but made substantial concessions regarding the Investment Canada Act's rules for American take-overs of Canadian companies and for a privileged American access to Canadian energy resources. This should have sufficed to keep the American market open to Canadian exporters. It seems that this is no longer the case. Large corporations and the U.S. administration alike want to take advantage of the terrorist threat to go much further in extracting concessions from Canada.

Indeed, under the leadership of large American owned corporations, which operate freely on both sides of the border, and with the new security concerns of the U.S. administration, the initial trade objective is being further expanded and pushed to a much higher level. The idea now is to turn the trade agreements into some sort of an umbrella political organization that would be parallel to the 27-nation European Union.

In fact, it could mean a more ambitious project that could go even further than the EU toward economic and political integration in North America. In Europe, the more than two dozens participating countries have retained control over their armed forces and over their foreign policies and, what is very important, no single country exercises a hegemonic control over the entire alliance. —That would not be the case in North America, however, because of the overwhelming importance of the United States vis-a-vis the other two countries.

Indeed, what has been advanced for Canada, Mexico and the United States—three countries very much dissimilar in populations, cultures and outlooks—could go as far as de facto merging the armed forces and foreign policies of all three countries to form a sort of Fortress North America under the protectorate of the United States. Any such deep integration beyond trade relationships would place the United States and its government in the driver's seat, with the other two countries somewhat relegated to the status of near political and economic colonies.

It won't work. —For one thing, the Canadian people will never accept that Canada become a colony of the United States, and the current minority government of Stephen Harper could pay dearly politically if it continues pushing in that direction. Canadians do not want their armed forces and their foreign policy to be de facto merged with those of imperial America. Moreover, they do not want their natural resources to be placed under U.S. control and exploited nearly completely by large American corporations, which have little regard for Canada's sovereignty and little concern for the welfare of Canadians. Also, they do not want the Canadian dollar ditched in favor of a less and less attractive U.S. dollar, as some have suggested.

However, all this could be the end result of the secretive efforts that have been deployed at the highest levels under the disguise of the mysterious acronym of "SPP", the so-called program of Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, also referred to by its proponents as "Deep Integration". This integration initiative was officially launched in a summit meeting between George W. Bush (USA), Vicente Fox (Mexico) and Paul Martin (Canada), held in Waco Texas, on March 23, 2005.

Large Canadian corporations and not so "Canadian" corporations any more—such as Alcan, about to be sold to British owned Rio Tinto—and many Canadian subsidiaries of American corporations have been the driving force behind the push for a North American Union. In Canada, they are regrouped within the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), which has been lobbying the Harper government in favor of the plan. —Among the 150 corporate members of the Canadian Council of CEOs, along side large Canadian banks and corporations, one finds many leading American corporations that have branches or subsidiaries in Canada, such as du Pont, Fed X, General Electric, General Motors, Chrysler, Hewlett-Packard, Home Depot, IBM, Imperial Oil, Kodak, 3M, Microsoft, Pratt & Whitney, Suncor, Wyeth, Xerox, etc. —These CEOs do not really see Canada as a country separate from the United States, but more as an adjacent market to be occupied and controlled.

It was four years ago, in January 2003, that the CCCE launched its North American Security and Prosperity Initiative (NASPI). The politicians then followed suit. The CCCE's initiative advanced a strategy comprising five major elements:

- 1- The Reinvention of Canada-U.S.-Mexico borders;
- 2- The Maximization of regulatory efficiencies;
- 3- The negotiation of a comprehensive continental resource security pact;
- 4- The negotiation of a North American defence alliance;
- 5- And the creation of a new institutional framework for this new North American Union.

Then the Canadian Council of CEOs enlisted the support of two other organizations, first, the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, a foreign affairs outfit that has been strongly supportive of George W. Bush's war against Iraq and, second, the Mexican Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales.

Their joint task force, called the Independent Task Force on the Future of North America, issued a report in May 2005, whose title was "Building a North American Community." The report contained 39 specific recommendations aimed at de facto erasing borders and at creating a single North American economic and security space within a North American political partnership, involving the United States, Canada and Mexico.

In a nutshell, the Task Force's central recommendation was to establish, by 2010 (only three years from now!!!), a North American economic and security community, the North American Union, the boundaries of which would be defined by a common external tariff and a common outer security perimeter, including a common border pass.—That is the essence of the proposed new "Deep Integration" project: One market, one economic border, and one official security apparatus. Nobody is talking yet of "one flag" or "one currency", but that could come.

This proposal has been discussed at summits held by the leaders of the three involved countries, first in Waco, Texas, in March 2005, to launch the initiative, then one year later in Cancun, Mexico, in March 2006, where it was decided to create the 30-member North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), a tri-national working group responsible for setting priorities for the SPP and to act as a stable driver of the deep integration process through changes in government in all three countries.

On August 20-21 (2007), at Château Montebello, in Montebello, Québec American President George W. Bush, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Felipe Calderon will again discuss the project during a third (SPP) summit. For most Canadians, until now, this trilateral initiative seemed simply to pursue the goal of facilitating trade and travel between the three countries, in a way that would not jeopardize the implementation of security measures that have become necessary in the aftermath of 9/11. For sure, if this were the only objective of such trilateral political and bureaucratic consultations (and they started in 2001) most people would understand the need, either for new physical installations at the border and/or for new administrative arrangements designed to reduce transit times, through pre-customs clearing or otherwise. They would not have the fear of

seeing their government embarking in a wholesale abandon of their national sovereignty.

As of now, however, one suspects that the long lines of Canadian trucks frequently observed at the U.S-Canada border, six years after 9/11, reflect some bad faith on the part of the U.S. government. It seems to be using terrorist threats as a excuse to raise its protectionist stance and a reason for applying undue pressures on the relatively inexperienced Harper government. Canadians remember how the Bush-Cheney administration refused to follow the rulings of numerous NAFTA arbitration panels and imposed upon Canada a managed trade deal for softwood lumber trade.

In any case, the objectives being pursued by the “Deep Integration” project go far beyond shortening transit times at the border. They are much more numerous and much more controversial and risky for Canada’s national sovereignty than simply building larger installations and harmonizing border controls to enhance trade and travel flows.

Indeed, the real overall goal of the “Deep Integration” project goes much further and would ultimately lead to the creation of a North American Union of a political and not only an economic nature, within which the three countries, but especially a smaller country such as Canada, could lose much of their national sovereignty. It would be an economic and political arrangement resembling the European Union, which encompasses more than two dozen countries, but in North America it is to be feared that such a union would have an imperial twist. —It would transform NAFTA into a common market and would force the two smaller partners to change all their relevant laws and regulations to conform to American laws and regulations, including toeing the American line on defense and foreign policies.

As it can be seen, we are quite far from the idea of simply having facilitated border controls for products and people. What these secret meetings are envisaging is more like a new political and comprehensive alliance between the United States, Canada and Mexico. But because of the force of gravity, this also means, in practice, that the United States will turn Canada, and to a certain extent Mexico, into quasi colonies of the U.S. —Indeed, the United States is a political elephant that does pretty much what it wants, especially under the Bush-Cheney administration, while Canada and Mexico are, at best, a small beaver in one case, and a small fox in the other. This could have the consequence of considerably reducing the quality of democratic life in Canada.

And that’s where the rubber hits the road. Once a medium size country accepts to merge de facto its defence policy with the policy of a much larger one, and all the more so with the United States which is an empire, it becomes very difficult for the former to maintain an independent foreign policy. —Its national sovereignty risks being forever diminished and compromised.

Many Canadians justly fear that the kind of “Deep Integration” that is being planned and promoted in relative secrecy could lead to the abandonment of an independent Canadian foreign policy, the loss of independence of the Canadian Armed forces, and the loss of national control over Canada’s national resources forcing Canada to abandon the economic rents over its oil and gas reserves, but also over its water and its hydroelectric power.

Some even fear that the next big step would be the abandon of the Canadian dollar, in favor of the U.S. dollar, and the loss of independent monetary and fiscal policies.—If this is not the case, where are the safeguards for Canada’s sovereignty and independence? What are the democratic foundations of such an enlarged political union? What are the political and

economic costs relative to the expected economic gains? There exists no study to my knowledge that evaluates these overall questions in order to form the basis for an enlightened public debate.

Therefore, we have to conclude that the plan for a very “Deep Integration” of Canada within North America is basically flawed, if not fundamentally democratically subversive. There has been no thorough public debate on the issue, even though the minority Harper government would certainly have to consult and persuade Canadians before tabling any special legislation that would need to be enacted before the project could be implemented.

Such a public debate has not taken place yet. On the contrary, everything seems to have been planned to keep it away from the public eye with all discussions being held behind closed doors. This should be enough to raise suspicions, even though the on-going discussions are not yet legally binding. In a more or less near future, however, the ad hoc arrangements so discussed are likely to lead to a new formal agreement or even a new treaty between the three countries. This is presently denied, but the logic of the operation militates in favor of the last option.

I personally think the issue is of such paramount importance that sooner or later we need a country-wide referendum on the entire “Deep Integration” project. A general election is not sufficient to settle such a complicated issue, because a single political party can gather a minority of votes and squeeze into power between numerous opposition parties. No fundamental democratic legitimacy for such an important political project can be obtained through a general election. For that, a special national referendum would be required so that the sovereign people can decide.

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