

Donald Trump and Canadian International Security

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The campaign and subsequent election of Donald Trump as President is raising serious international security issues for Canada. It is ironic that it is the democratic process of Canada's most important ally and trading partner that has created this new security reality. Trump is doing what he promised to do – which, nominally, should be a good thing. In a democratic system, there is often a criticism of leaders who say one thing while campaigning and then do something else. No one can suggest that Trump did not warn the American electorate what he was intending to do. The problem is that few in Canada (and elsewhere in the international system) expected his promise and messages to lead to his victory. But not only did he win, he is showing every indication of moving as quickly as possible to fulfil those promises. So what are some of the policies and what how will they effect Canada?

His very recent moves to forbid the movement of individuals from seven Arab countries is of course part of his promise to eliminate the alleged threat posed by terrorists coming into United States in the guise of refugees. However, there are significant difficulties inherent in what he is attempting to do and what he has done. Perhaps one of the biggest ironies is that there is significantly little evidence to suggest that this is an effective means against terrorism. As well, both Saudi Arabia, a Moslem

state, and Russia are glaringly absent from this list. In one of the very few cases of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists coming into the United States, that of 9/11, the terrorists came from Saudi Arabia. The Boston Marathon bombers were refugees from Russia. Yet, these states are not on his list for reasons that are not publically known. Of the seven states on the list, most have seen some form of American military operations – Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Iran directly and Yemen, Syria, and Sudan indirectly (eg use of UAVs etc.). Their inclusion seems, therefore, to have more to do with American involvement on their soil rather than any evidence that terrorists have attempted to enter the US from them. So if the reason is to stop the movement of terrorists into the US, it is baffling that Saudi Arabia and/or Russia are not included. Furthermore, this move will undoubtedly create stronger resentment against all western states within the Islamic world and will lead to increased recruitment of terrorists. Thus, the net result of banning individuals from these states will be to only make the threat worst while, at the same time, penalizing a very large number of innocent people for no legitimate reason.

The problems this creates for Canada are clear. First, there is no intention on the part of the Canadian government (or any of the other federal political parties) to follow the American lead. It is reasonable to assume that some of the individuals that are now separated from families in the US will come to Canada. It is also likely that Canada will now accept some of the refugees that the Trump directive will ban. Given the mind-set that is now emerging in the US, such Canadian moves will not be seen by the Americans as compassionate but as opening a back door for these alleged threats to enter the US. As such, it will be just a matter of time until the American administration will begin to pressure Canada to change its refugee policies. Since this is unlikely to happen, the Americans will probably move to increase their security along the Canadian border making it more problematic for all Canadians to enter that country and vice-versa.

The second impact on Canadian security will be that of increased hatred towards the “West” in the Middle East. It is unlikely that any of the actual fundamental terrorists will draw a distinction between the American actions and the rest of the western world. Thus, any Canadian involvement in addressing the many different security threats in that region of the world - such as military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or Somalia - will become much more dangerous for Canada in the long term.

The second major set of steps that Trump has begun to take that will severely impact on Canadian security involve the relationships with Russia and NATO. Trump has been very critical of the NATO alliance while treating Russia with growing respect. His unwillingness to accept the evidence gathered by his own intelligence agencies of Russian interference on the American electoral process has baffled most observers. His continual criticism of NATO members for not “carrying” their own weight while admiring the Russian president suggests that he is about to change American policy towards Russia. Specifically, there is growing speculation that he may move to lift the sanctions against Russia. Since these were imposed because of their seizure of the Crimea by military forces and their continued efforts to de-stabilize eastern Ukraine, such a move would be signalling the Russians that their actions are now accepted by the US. Such a signal would undoubtedly encourage the Russian government to continue in its increasing use of force to achieve its political objectives.

The security ramifications for Canada are clear. First and most important, NATO has provided the backbone of the Canadian commitment to collective security. Without NATO, Canada would need to draw its security much closer to the United States than what it has in the past. Canada would lose the balance that it has had since 1949 between the Americans and the Europeans regarding collective security. At the same time, a reduction of the cohesion of NATO could also encourage Russia in the use of military force to achieve its policy objectives in the region surrounding its borders. What then would that mean for the Canadian forces that have been deployed to the Western Ukraine as trainers? What would it mean for Canadian Forces sent to the Baltics and other eastern European members? The answers to these questions will be clearer as Trump develops these policies. At a minimum, Trump can be expected to ask for the members of NATO to pay more into their own defence budget. Canada should not expect to be excluded.

Trump has also begun to move against the existing international liberal trading system. He has withdrawn American participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and had directed his officials to renegotiate NAFTA. Besides being an important trading agreement, the TPP was also directed at containing growing power of China. Likewise, NAFTA was also intended to help stabilize Mexico. With the American withdrawal from both, new and uncertain security consequences will soon arise.

Already some states such as Australia and New Zealand have talked about creating a regional trading bloc that could include China. If that was to occur, the Chinese power in the region would grow. Likewise, an eliminated NAFTA in combination with other such steps such as the “wall” and other steps to isolate Mexico, could have a very dangerous impact on that state’s efforts to contain the drug cartels and other lawless elements. It is entirely conceivable that Trump’s actions could re-ignite a Mexican civil conflict comparable to the period of 1910-1920, in which the US felt compelled to intervene.

Trump also seems to believe that an American move towards increased protectionism will not result in other states taking similar actions. He seems unaware or uncaring of the connection that has existed historically between the rise of a protectionist international system and the rise of demagogues in the international system. As the late 1920s and 1930 demonstrate, the economic chaos that is often unleashed by protectionism will often allow extremists to seize power. Such an international system will therefore could create a stark and dangerous environment for Canada. It clearly threatens Canadian economic security and beyond.

The security ramifications of Trump’s move toward greater protectionism are indeed stark for Canada. There is little debate that Canada’s economic prosperity is based on an open and liberal trading system. Remove that, and it is possible that Canadian economic growth and stability will be threatened. If that happens, what then happens to unity of the Canadian state itself? A move to adapt to a more protectionist international trading system will inevitably favour some Canadian regions over others. How will the Canadian state respond to such changes?

Also if Trump’s actions do result in a Mexican implosion, what will that mean for Canadian security? It is unlikely that a Canadian government would be able to stand aside if that country became enveloped in violence. But the exact nature of that Canadian response would depend of the threat that the Mexican state came to face.

Overall, Trump’s actions and promises have very real and significant impacts on Canadian security. Given the direction in which he is moving, there is very little room for optimism. In his determination to “make America great,” he is moving to dismantle

much of the international security architectures that have served Canadian security so well over the years.