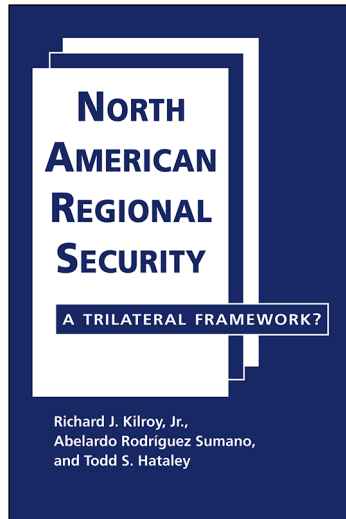


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# North American Regional Security: A Trilateral Framework?

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ISBN: 978-1-58826-854-9 hc



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# 1

## A Trilateral Security Framework?

On New Year's Eve 1999, an Algerian Canadian named Ahmed Ressay was arrested while trying to cross from Canada to the United States with explosives. In the aftermath of deconstructing this event, it became clear that Ressay was intent on carrying out a terrorist attack on a US target.<sup>1</sup> On September 11, 2001, three related yet separate terrorist attacks on US soil set the course for what would become the largest reorganization of US security bureaucracy in history, which would also have a regional and global security policy impact. In August and September 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused widespread devastation along the US Gulf Coast, notably New Orleans and the immediate surrounding area. As US emergency response crews scrambled to bring relief and humanitarian assistance to the Gulf region, they were joined by emergency assistance crews from Canada and Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Finally, on Christmas Day 2009, an attempt by an al-Qaeda extremist to down an inbound Detroit flight was foiled by vigilant passengers and crew. The fallout from that attempt has dictated new security measures for regional and global air travel.<sup>3</sup>

The common thread running through all of the above incidents, other than the fact that they represent some type of security problem, is their impact on regional politics in North America. The attempted smuggling of bombing material by Ressay and the attacks on the twin towers in New York on 9/11 resulted in, among other things, new border policies regulating the flow of goods and people within the North American region.<sup>4</sup> Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, by contrast, showed that regional support in time of disasters could be and

was efficiently dispersed from regional neighbors to provide support and disaster relief. The Christmas Day 2009 attempt to bring down a Detroit-bound airliner on final approach further illustrates how threats that emanate from outside the region can have severe regional consequences. The increased security for inbound US flights caused havoc at airports in Canada and Mexico (these two countries make up over half of all tourist travel to the United States, which includes a large percentage of air travel).<sup>5</sup> In short, security threats to the North American region have raised the question of how to best approach security concerns emanating from both outside and within the North American continent.

Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, along with David Lake and Patrick Morgan (and a few others), have suggested that an appropriate level for analyzing security interaction is to begin at the regional level.<sup>6</sup> The regional level, they argue, may provide a more accurate picture of the security atmosphere since most threats travel over shorter distances and, therefore, insecurities that states feel are frequently a result of the neighborhood. The extension to this security approach, of course, is to consider security threats to the neighborhood as threats to those states (and by extension the citizens of those states) within the neighborhood. In our view regional security has two related, yet conceptually different components: the impact of security threats that emanate within the region; and the impact of those that enter from outside the region. Although conceptually different, logic states that if a threat can move into the region from outside, it can certainly move within the region once established in the neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> The integrated nature of the North American marketplace, a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), has substantially increased the amount of cross-border interaction between member countries, facilitating not only the transborder movement of legitimate goods, people, and services, but also those goods, people, and services that could be considered illegitimate and security threats.<sup>8</sup> We speak here, of course, about such things as drugs, terrorists, weapons, organized crime, pandemics, and natural disasters, to name a few.

The idea that Canada, the United States, and Mexico should enter into some type of regional security agreement has received increasing attention in the past decade for a number of reasons. Certainly, the events of 9/11 had some security commentators, especially those in the United States, suggesting the need for some type of

perimeter security framework, designed essentially to secure the approaches to the North American continent.<sup>9</sup> Critics of this approach suggested this was simply a way for the United States to extend its influence and push its borders beyond its geographic limits.<sup>10</sup> More recently, violence from the Mexican drug wars has, in limited degrees, found its way north, spilling over the US-Mexico border into US border communities and, some suggest, into Canadian cities as well.<sup>11</sup> The idea of a regional security agreement has not gone without political action. In March 2005, President George W. Bush, Prime Minister Paul Martin, and President Vicente Fox announced the establishment of the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). Although no longer in existence, the SPP did attempt to establish a framework for trilateral security cooperation in North America.

The events of 9/11, drug violence, and the SPP aside, the idea that North America should form or does form some type of security complex has received only limited analysis. What does exist has largely focused on tactical and strategic arguments for structuring a regional security arrangement. These analyses have, in many cases, argued why or why not a regional security arrangement is critical to homeland security. Less prevalent, but still evident, have been the few arguments as to the viability of a regional security complex.<sup>12</sup> Absent from much of these analyses is a defined starting point to explain what matters in a regional security arrangement.

The purpose of this book is to examine what is essential to the establishment of a regional security complex. Our argument is that regional security complexes will either stand or fall based on the existence of certain variables. Our purpose, therefore, is to identify those variables, or to highlight what matters in the establishment and maintenance of regional security complexes. We employ this argument in the case of a North American security complex, encompassing Canada, the United States, and Mexico; apply those variables to this specific case; and make some suggestions as to the viability and direction of a North American security complex.

In this book, we look at the evolution from bilateral security relations prior to 9/11 to the unilateral approach on the new perimeter and security relations in North America to the creation of a trilateral regional security framework involving the United States, Canada, and Mexico. We further examine threat perspectives during the evolution of several historical events such as World War II, the Cold

War, the Global War on Terror, and, most recently, natural disasters and transnational organized crime. The thesis we offer is that, while security relationships between the three countries have appeared to suggest the existence of a North American security complex, there remain significant obstacles, derived from different threat perceptions based on identities, institutions, and interests that will impede further integration and cooperation.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical overview of approaches to regional security analysis: Lake and Morgan's regional orders approach and Buzan and Waever's regional security complex theory (RSCT). Although we briefly examine both approaches, the emphasis is on the latter of the two as our central theoretical framework. In this chapter, we define what is meant by security and region. We also expand on the argument as to why a regional security approach and, specifically, regional security complex theory are useful tools for analyzing the North American region. We provide additional details regarding regional security complex theory, specifically with the purpose of understanding how to operationalize the theory. Finally, we introduce readers to a blended analytical approach that incorporates different theoretical lenses within the identity-institutions-interests (I-I-I)<sup>13</sup> framework as a key analytical intersection with regional security complex theory.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 3 provides a contextual overview of the United States, Canada, and Mexico and the development of security relationships in North America through a historical lens. In this chapter, we briefly examine the key historical events that have impacted their interactions and the conflicts that have been shaped by each nation's unique identity, interests, and institutions, which have contributed to insecurities as well as cooperation. Interaction between these countries before and after World War II provides an important understanding of how the concept of perimeter defense, which was developed at the time, has come back into vogue in light of the post-9/11 security environment.

In Chapter 4, we look at the concepts of convergence and divergence of regional security cooperation in North America in light of events since the end of World War II and the focus on broader hemispheric security initiatives such as the Summit of the Americas and the Defense Ministerial of the Americas. However, the key event that came to identify the concept of regional cooperation was not based on security but rather economics. The formation of NAFTA in 1994 placed

Canada, Mexico, and the United States in a new trade union relationship that was to have broader security dimensions as each nation now had increased connectivity and vulnerability, although the institutional processes of NAFTA left many of the security interests unresolved.

Chapter 5 deals with the security environment produced by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and how these significantly altered relations between Mexico, Canada, and the United States as each nation began to respond to the new global threat to their identities, institutions, and interests. In order to prevent another attack on the homeland, the US government aimed to strengthen its defenses through domestic and foreign policy initiatives that redefine security relationships in North America. Regionally, the idea was to expand on preexisting security structures to form a new defense perimeter, with the newly created US institutions—such as US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—in the epicenter, serving as the backbone to the overreaching security complex. However, in light of the ensuing US-led Global War on Terror, Canada and Mexico did not see eye-to-eye with the United States in sharing the same threat perception and thus found themselves at odds over security policies. The focus on terrorism and defining the nature of the threat also produced significant internal debates within Canada and Mexico, in particular on what an appropriate national security strategy should be in order to determine each nation's identity in the new regional security complex.

In Chapter 6, we look at the nature of the trilateral relationship subsequent to the US invasion of Iraq and attempts made by the George W. Bush administration to create new instruments for security cooperation in North America through the Security and Prosperity Partnership. Ironically, the efforts of the leaders of the three powerful nations were not as influential as those of Mother Nature in her destructiveness as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita wreaked havoc in the Gulf Coast region. The new threat of a catastrophic natural disaster exposed considerable vulnerabilities, both economically and physically, as threats to security took on an “all hazards” perspective for all three countries. To add to these developments, the rise of transnational criminal gangs and drug trafficking took on new levels of violence and concern for the three countries as new security policies took shape under the Mérida Initiative and other mechanisms.

In Chapter 7, we provide an analysis of how, despite the appearance of increased cooperation and shared threat perceptions, there

still remain a number of contradictions and tensions in regional security issues that challenge the notion of whether new institutions could foster shared interests and overcome individual national identity in creating a regional security complex in North America. In this chapter, we further explore some of the traditional problems associated with borders between states and how new threats, such as transnational regional crime networks, challenge the state's ability to provide both internal and external security against threats that do not recognize the borders, sovereignty, or even legitimacy of state actors.

In Chapter 8, we look to the future and whether security cooperation in North America will converge or diverge given the significant challenges ahead as all three states face unique domestic political issues and upcoming electoral changes. We examine the nature of defining security cultures in North America, which can create cooperative institutions, share interests, and respect identity, in the context of a trilateral relationship. We conclude the chapter where this study starts—by reexamining the concept of regional security complex theory and its applicability to the contemporary security challenges that states face in forming policy outcomes to deal with real threats.

Despite each of us coming into this project with our own unique national identities, shaped by our individual academic studies and our professional experiences working in the security communities we examine here, we have attempted to do our best to remain objective in our analysis. We do not pretend to have solved the problems that have inhibited increased security cooperation between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. However, we do believe that, by conducting this study through our collective lenses, we have been able to shed some unique insights into the challenges that our three countries face collectively in forging a new security relationship in the years to come.

## Notes

1. For more details of Ressam's plan as well as links to al-Qaeda, see Hall Bernton, Mike Carter, David Heath, and James Neff, "The Terrorist Within," *Seattle Times*, June 23–July 7, 2002, <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/news/nation-world/terroristwithin/>, accessed January 12, 2010.

2. This was the first time that the Mexican military had been on US soil since 1846. As part of the relief effort, the Mexican military provided water



treatment plants and mobile kitchens. See “Mexican Troops Aid Katrina Efforts,” Fox News, September 8, 2005, [www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,168778,00.html](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,168778,00.html), accessed January 12, 2010.

3. Increased security checks for US-bound flights resulted in wait times in excess of three hours, delays, and cancellations. See Laura Stone, “Delays, Cancellations Continue at Canadian Airports,” *National Post*, December 28, 2009, [www.nationalpost.com/m/story.html?id=2385834](http://www.nationalpost.com/m/story.html?id=2385834), accessed January 12, 2010.

4. The Smart Border Accord—one signed between Mexico and the United States and one between Canada and the United States—is the best example of the larger change in border policies within the region. See Veronica Kitchen, “Smarter Cooperation in Canada-US Relations,” *International Journal* 59 (2003–2004): 693–710; Peter Andreas, “Politics on the Edge: Managing the US-Mexico Border,” *Current History* (February 2006): 64–68.

5. International Trade Administration Monthly Tourism statistics, 2010, <http://tinnet.ita.doc.gov/view/m-2010-I-001/table1.html>, accessed July 11, 2011. While overall outbound flights from the United States were down 11 percent in total and down in every region of the world, air traffic actually increased by 6–8 percent to Mexico and Canada; [http://tinnet.ita.doc.gov/tinews/archive/tinews2011/20110630\\_US\\_Intrenational\\_Outbound.html](http://tinnet.ita.doc.gov/tinews/archive/tinews2011/20110630_US_Intrenational_Outbound.html), June 30, 2011.

6. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Lake and Patrick Morgan, ed., *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

7. This was certainly the case in early January 2010 with regard to an estimated twenty Yemeni-trained al-Qaeda terrorists who, according to Canadian intelligence officials, were trying to gain access to North America by entering through Canada. The intelligence reports suggested that their target was not Canada but ultimately the United States. See “Security Warnings Prompted Airline Security Alert: Baird,” CTV News, January 12, 2010, [http://toronto.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100112/airport\\_security\\_100112/20100112?hub=TorontoNewHome](http://toronto.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100112/airport_security_100112/20100112?hub=TorontoNewHome), accessed January 14, 2010.

8. Lee Hudson Teslik, “NAFTA’s Economic Impact,” Council on Foreign Relations, July 7, 2009, [www.cfr.org/economics/naftas-economic-impact/p15790](http://www.cfr.org/economics/naftas-economic-impact/p15790), accessed July 11, 2010; Clyde Gary Hufbauer and Jeffrey J. Schott, *NAFTA Revisited: Achievements and Challenges* (Washington, DC: Pearson Institute for International Economics, 2005).

9. Richard J. Kilroy, Jr., Abelardo Rodríguez, and Todd Hataley, “Toward a New Trilateral Strategic Security Relationship: United States, Canada, and Mexico,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 3, no. 2 (February 2010): 51–63.

10. See Laura Carlson, “Armoring NAFTA: The Battleground for Mexico’s Future,” North American Congress on Latin America, August 27, 2008, <https://nacla.org/node/4958>, accessed July 11, 2011.

11. Carol Cratty, "Mexican Drug Cartels Extend Reach into US," CNN, March 26, 2010, [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-26/us/drug.trends\\_1\\_drug-cartels-mexican-border-drug-violence?\\_s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-26/us/drug.trends_1_drug-cartels-mexican-border-drug-violence?_s=PM:US), accessed July 11, 2011.

12. Rafael Fernandez de Castro makes the case that Mexico, in particular, should see the value in supporting US needs for regional security and a security perimeter in North America. "NAFTA at 10: Progress, Potential, and Precedents" (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, December 9–10, 2002), 11, [www.wilsoncenter.org/article/nafta-10-progress-potential-and-precedents](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/nafta-10-progress-potential-and-precedents).

13. Lewis Griffith and David Hamm, *Drivers of Political Behavior* (Montgomery, AL: Air University Press, 2006).

14. Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*.