

The Securitization of the US–Canada Border in American Political Discourse

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Introduction

Over 80 per cent of the Canadian population lives within 100 kilometers of the US–Canada border, and cross-border power dynamics have long structured political, social, and economic policy in Canada. For the majority of the twentieth century, the bilateral relationship was characterized by “the longest undefended border in the world.” This has fundamentally changed from undefended border to a smart border—and from a focus on facilitation to one of defense in depth. In this article we examine how the representation of the US–Canada border changed in official and bureaucratic discourse. We apply the Copenhagen School theory of securitization to the discourse of border security, which is the model in which the elite names an emergency and, with audience acceptance, the political sector becomes a matter for security policy, reducing possibilities for democratic debate. Securitization theory alone however cannot account for the complex changes we observe. Consequently, we use insights from the Paris School, based on analysis centred on notions of field and habitus borrowed from Bourdieu, to make two points: the process of securitization is not only a linguistic act but takes place within a social context; also, the process of securitization is not a single coup de grace but an iterative process within a particular field. We demonstrate this through

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discursive analysis of American policy statements between 2004 and 2005 and a participant observation of an American expert consultation on border security technologies in 2009.

Two empirical findings demonstrate our key theoretical insights. First, ideas, narratives, tropes and language used in the securitization of the US–Canada border have their own internal momentum that does not necessarily correspond to historical realities; in this example, the case of Ahmed Ressam (the Millennium bomber) is almost entirely absent from the discourse after 2001. Second, the trope of terrorism has come to act as a discursive trump (swallowing other security threats) within elite discourse, but not at the working level of law enforcement which is concerned with the day-to-day policing, affirming that there are multiple speakers and audiences for securitizing moves.

US–Canada Border Security

In 1995, Canada and the United States announced the Shared Border Accord, a joint initiative directed at improving trade and travel between the two countries while providing increased protection against illicit cross-border activities (Embassy of the USA, 1995). Measures, including improvements to pre-clearance expedited travel programs, resulted from this initiative alongside measures intended to address concerns such as drug trafficking and illegal immigration. The Shared Border Accord thus demonstrated increased attention to security concerns at the US–Canada border while continuing to maintain trade and travel priorities held by both countries (Pellerin, 2005: 57). Further commitments to joint efforts at addressing border concerns continued over the years following the Shared Border Accord, including the creation of the Canada–United States Partnership (CUSP), a forum in which co-operation would be emphasized in discussions of border management and efficiency, as announced by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and President Bill Clinton in October 1999 (Government of Canada, 2000; Kitchen, 2004: 708).

In December 1999, US–Canada border security received increased attention, as Ahmed Ressam was apprehended at the US–Canada border with explosives that were to be detonated at Los Angeles airport. The highly publicized “Millennium bomber” case of Ressam revealed significant weaknesses in the Canadian passport application process. Ressam had been living in Canada as a refugee and was able to obtain a Canadian passport using a fake baptismal certificate (Salter, 2004: 83–84). Andreas explains that the event had significant political repercussions for US–Canada border relations in the immediate aftermath, in which Canada was accused by American media of being “soft on terrorism” (2005, 453–54).

Abstract. In this paper, the authors analyze the empirical process of securitization of the US–Canada border and then reflect on the model proposed by the Copenhagen School. We argue that securitization theory oversimplifies the political process of securitizing moves and audience acceptance. Rather than attributing securitization to a singular speaker addressing a specific audience, we present overlapping and ongoing language security games performed by varying relevant actors during the key period between the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) in December 2004 and the signing of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) in June 2005, showing how multiple speakers participate in the continuing construction of a context in which this issue is increasingly treated as a matter of security. We also explore the language adopted by participants in the field, focusing on an expert panel convened by the Homeland Security Institute. We conclude that in the securitization of the US–Canada border there are inconsistencies between truth and discourse, as well as significant distinctions between official and bureaucratic discourses, further emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive model of securitization.

Résumé. Dans cet article, les auteurs font l'analyse du processus empirique de la sécurisation de la frontière Canado-Américaine à travers la réflexion sur le modèle proposé par l'École de Copenhague. Nous soutenons que cette théorie de sécurisation simplifie trop le processus politique de son initiation et de l'acceptation de l'auditeur. Au lieu d'attribuer la sécurisation à un orateur, s'adressant à un public particulier, nous présentons les jeux de langage continus effectués par plusieurs acteurs pendant la période suivant la Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) en décembre 2004, jusqu'à l'approbation de la Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP) en juin 2005. Nous maintenons que plusieurs orateurs participent dans la construction continue du contexte dans lequel l'affaire est de plus en plus comprise dans le cadre de sécurité. Nous explorons aussi le langage employé par les participants dans le champ, observant surtout un groupe d'experts convoqué au Homeland Security Institute. Nous concluons que dans le cas de la sécurisation de la frontière Canado-Américaine il existe des incohérences entre le discours et le réel, ainsi que des distinctions significatives entre les discours officiels et bureaucratiques, mettant l'accent sur l'importance d'un modèle compréhensif de sécurisation.

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks, Canada and the United States demonstrated once more a joint commitment to the prioritization of security at their shared border, through the Smart Border Accord, accompanied by a 30-point action plan (Kitchen, 2004; Salter, 2007). According to Andreas, this agreement, signed in December 2001 represents a moment at which it becomes glaringly evident that the United States and Canada were actively engaging in attempts to maintain the facilitation of positive economic activities while emphasizing the border's role as a security barrier. (2005: 458) The focus on creating a "smart" border is illustrated in the adoption of risk management approaches, such as pre-clearance programs like NEXUS and FAST, used to facilitate the movement of known and "safe" travellers across the border, while allowing for increased attention to inspections of higher risk or unknown travellers (Kitchen, 2004: 695; Salter, 2007: 304–05).

The US–Canada border has since seen increases in border security measures, in the form of the adoption of more sophisticated technologies, a more significant agency presence at the border and in continued and improved co-ordination of efforts by Canadian and American actors.

Salter emphasizes the role of technology in both surveillance and in the process of authenticating the identity of a cross-border traveller, explaining that risk management efforts at the US–Canada border have been aided by increases in the use of surveillance equipment as well as the adoption of biometric technologies in the identification process (2007: 304–05). While in 2001, United States patrol on the US–Canada border totaled only 334 agents, it was deemed necessary by the US Congress to triple that presence in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks (Andreas, 2005: 452, 455). These measures serve to illustrate the dramatic shift that occurred at the US–Canada border towards a more heavily prioritized security agenda.

One highly visible security measure came in the form of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) announced by the United States in April 2005. This initiative, which emerged from the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act enacted in December 2004, contained stipulations as to the documentation requirements for all persons entering or re-entering the United States, including American citizens. The WHTI, which addressed cross-border travel by land, air, and sea, stipulated that all persons entering the United States would be required to present a valid passport or equivalent approved document. This requirement was initially due to take effect at land-border crossings as of January 1, 2007. This represented a point of contention, however, with Canada and the implementation of the rule for land-borders was postponed until June 2009. The requirements of the WHTI represented a significant departure from the types of documentation previously accepted at land-border crossings (Kitchen and Sasikumar, 2009: 164–65).

Some authors have attempted to explain the shift that has recently occurred surrounding the US–Canada border and demonstrate the impact of this shift on the types of policies that have subsequently emerged. In his recent work, Andreas argues that the issues that could be considered matters of concern at the border were, prior to the September 11, 2001, attacks, generally kept out of the political and media spotlight. Efforts made to keep attention away from the US–Canada border were facilitated by the emphasis on concerns at the US–Mexico border, but that the border was poorly guarded and porous became a highly politicized issue following the September 11, 2001, attacks despite the absence of a link between the events and the US northern border. Andreas says that regardless of the absence of such a link, “the US–Canada border was a ready-made target for those who blamed lax controls for America’s vulnerability to terrorism” (2005: 454–45). Similarly, in an attempt to understand this shift, Whitaker argues that while the September 11, 2001, attacks were not the result of US–Canada border failures, the “Canadian connection argument quickly shifted to another, more slippery terrain: terrorists “could” enter through Canada” (2004–2005: 59). Andreas attempts to

explain this in different language, stating that “the main US worry is that the expansive commercial cross-border networks and routes (both legal and illegal) can now be exploited to smuggle terrorists and weapons of mass destruction into the United States” (2005: 460).

As Salter argues, the change in policy priorities reflects that, whereas the US–Canada border had previously been viewed as “internal,” it was now considered to be “external” and inherently risky (2004: 83). This thus indicates a profound shift in the perception of the US–Canada border, illustrating that it has been pushed further into the realm of security than it has been in the past.

Securitization Theory

Current studies of US borders are heavily weighted to the southern border with Mexico, or the delocalized borders of visa and immigration policies. As a homeland security problem, there is little wonder that the US–Mexican border takes priority. Empirically, this is driven by the scale of the “problem” of border security; thousands of illegal migrants cross the US–Mexico border every day during the high season, whereas estimates of US–Canada annual infiltrations vary between the hundreds and thousands, with the vast majority of those illegal crossings being concerned with smuggling of goods or drugs rather than individuals. However, as demonstrated by the recent expansion of the Secure Border Initiative and the launching of UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) Predator Drone patrols across the remote northern American border, the US–Canada border has remains a homeland security priority. Our first question was how the US–Canada border come to be treated as this kind of security issue, conditioned by both a sense of emergency and a new strategy of risk management.

Within international relations, the Copenhagen School offers the most promising theory of how particular issues come to be treated as security issues, and suggests what the political impact of that securitization might be. Buzan made the argument that national security can be divided into sectors: military and security, societal, economic, political and ecological (1991). Particular issues are perceived or understood as security threats, while other issues are regarded as the subject of normal politics. Buzan and colleagues (1997) proposed a theory of securitization: elites make a “securitizing move” by which they describe an issue area within a sector as an existential threat that can only be met by emergency measures and extraordinary powers. If this securitizing move is accepted by “the audience”—which is radically under-defined in the original version—then the issue becomes a security issue and democratic debate is shut down. While threats within the military and economic

realm were well understood, the analytical traction of the Copenhagen School came from the concern with societal security and the highlighting of national identity as a referent object of security policies. Migration, for example, has been portrayed as a threat to societal security in Europe but with limited success (Huysmans, 2006: 149–50). Within this framework, the focus is on the “speech act” of naming an issue a security issue, following the linguistic theory of illocutionary speech acts (Stritzel 2007). While the theory allows for issues to have internal or natural characteristics that make some issues more amenable than others to securitizing moves, the social or contextual aspects of speaker and audience are largely absent from the initial formulation. A number of theorists, including Stritzel (2007), Balzacq (2005), Salter (2008) and Balzacq and Léonard (2011) have all made suggestions as to how to accommodate the social or contextual dimensions of securitizing moves. At a minimum, it is clear that there are multiple audiences for securitizing moves, and that securitizing moves must be seen as a process rather than a single coup de grace (Balzacq, 2008; Roe, 2008). Rather than trying to identify a single speech act that might represent the moment of securitization for the US–Canada border, we argue that securitization is a constant process of struggle and contestation, with different actors and agents making plays for the ground of security and the political, discursive and material resources that such a successful claim can bring.

Methodology: Field versus Discourse

Two approaches dominate the investigation of the securitization process: discursive and sociological. Hansen, for example, provides a clear framework for schematically analyzing security discourse and its referent objects. Choosing the referent identities, the intertextual model (official, popular, cultural or political discourses, and so forth), the time frame, and the number of discursive events, she admirably and instructively sets out how to justify a particular research project (2006: 81). Bigo, on the other hand, provides a clear model of how the habitus of a particular professional field structures security discourse. He demonstrates that the everyday language and practices of police, military officials, consultants, politicians and bureaucrats increasingly converge, because their work life concentrates on the same political problems (2006). Our paper combines these two approaches by engaging in both discursive and sociological analysis. We demonstrate clearly that, in fact, it is extremely difficult to identify single or signal instances of securitizing moves or acceptance within the complex field of border policy. Rather, when the elite political discourse and sociological habitus are in tension, and we see securi-

tization as a political space of constant discursive and practical struggle for authority and resources.

We offer two sites of data: discursive analysis of American public discourse and a participant observation of an expert meeting of the implementation of border security technologies. This follows dissatisfaction with the Copenhagen's exclusive focus on the linguistic nature of securitization. We argue, along with Balzacq (2005) and Stritzel (2007), that the core process of securitization is an essentially social process, a securitizing move that is accepted or rejected by an audience. The acceptance or rejection of that move has been under-theorized by the Copenhagen School, and its critics, as demonstrated by Balzacq and Léonard (2011) and Salter (2011). And so, in addition to mapping out those linguistic moves, we feel it is also important to understand how that language is used by the field of experts who work in this sector, expecting that the individuals who work on border security will use different language and play different political games than those who speak directly to the public (Bigo, 2006; Neal, 2009).

This kind of Bourdieusian political sociology presents a number of practical challenges. We seek to represent two slices of the American field of border security, with the understanding that there are multiple fields, actors, interests and discourses that are competing for political, social, economic and bureaucratic support (Salter, 2008). However, the two slices we offer give a new insight into how the border has become incompletely securitized.

With the specificity of this study is important to acknowledge the limitations of the ethnographic approach. At professional meetings on border management reported by Muller (2008), the primary concern was facilitation of cross-border traffic, under conditions of high volume and increased security threats. A workshop attended by Salter, sponsored by the US Army War College and New Mexico State University and attended by military and local police, on the other hand, demonstrated the gap between facilitation and crime prevention in the minds of the practitioners. We insist on an important insight of the sociological approach to the study of securitization: the process is dependent on actor, audience, and context.

Discourse Analysis

Focusing on the language that is used to describe political events and situations follows from a constructivist and post-structuralist critique of epistemic realism. Interests, roles, and rationalities are all constructed within language, and these language games make certain policy and identity choices possible. This method has been particularly emphasized in work following the Copenhagen School because of their focus on illocu-

tionary acts. However, it is our finding that these illocutionary acts do not spring fully formed from the head of Zeus, President Bush, Governor Ridge or any other actor. Rather, the language describing a particular policy nexus is always already in play by the actors and agencies engaged in the day-to-day practices of border security. We highlight the system or the larger game in which these particular speech acts are situated. It may be true that all public political discourse is necessarily or intentionally vague. However, if this is true, then public discourse provides a clear test case for the securitization theory: what is the degree of specificity required to compel or convince an audience? A famous 1984 Reagan-Bush television campaign suggested “there is a bear in the woods” but the foundation for that ad was a host of specific geopolitical discourses about the second cold war.

In order to better understand the process by which the US–Canada border is perceived as a policy area in need of more security, we start with a discourse analysis of the period leading up to the formalization of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America. In this article, we examine the speeches of President George W. Bush and the Department of Homeland Security, which are crucial to the construction of the security context surrounding the issue of the US–Canada border.

The content analysis consisted of an examination of the discursive tools, mainly threat-naming and presentations of evidence, adopted by the speakers in their statements. Presentations of evidence included explicit references to particular incidents, budget information, public opinion polls and personal accounts. Threat-naming was identified ranging from general (such as the permeability of the border) to specific (a particular group of people participating in a specific activity). The content analysis also considered what was *not* said by the speakers. Statements may contain elements called entailments and presuppositions (Chilton, 2004). An entailment is what may be implied by a statement based on a truth relation, regardless of its verifiability. A sentence such as (a) *the border patrol agents arrested the driver of a vehicle containing illegal narcotics* entails the sentence (b) *a person was attempting to transport contraband across the border*. If (a) is true, then (b) is necessarily true. Presuppositions serve as indications of the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Whether true or not, speakers may use language that is vague or that rests on knowledge that is assumed to be shared or common. We see this as a major absence, in both Hansen but other models of discourse analysis used in securitization theory. There is an absence of the consideration of the quotidian. The presuppositions of the statements presented by the speakers serves to clarify what the speakers take for granted as common ground. It is also relevant to this research in that it serves to illuminate at what point a formerly explicit element becomes one that is implicitly presupposed, that is to say, at what point a speaker finds it

unnecessary to attempt to convince his or her audience of this argument and adopts it as already commonly accepted. We do not gauge the broader public audience acceptance or rejection of these elite securitizing moves but do engage with the expert audience below.

Participant Observation

One of the drivers of international political sociology has been a recognition that discourse analysis must take account of the social context in which it is generated. The social and linguistic field is constituted through the habitus, or daily use in the life-world of experts. Rather than rely exclusively on public documents, this method includes observation and participation in the policy discussions of the field of experts.

We also focus on an expert panel convened by the Homeland Security and Analysis Institute (HSI) to gauge community perceptions of border security technologies. The HSI is an American government-funded think-tank established to provide the Department of Homeland Security with objective and impartial analysis. The role of think-tanks in the formulation of foreign policy is well known but underdeveloped in the field of homeland security (Abelson, 2006). In providing their analysis of potential technologies to support border policing, the HSI invited a number of community representatives to participate in a two-day workshop on two potential systems. This “outreach” gathering was led by HSI staff and included Department of Homeland Security officials, police, representatives of civil society (camping, landowner and recreational sector associations), and security experts from both the United States and Canada, including political scientists, criminologists, lawyers and sociologists. It was notable in being the first such HSI community outreach event to which Canadian experts were invited, and provides an excellent window into the habitus of border security.¹ The meeting was not classified, nor was the preparatory materials, but it was not open to the public. What issues were salient and what arguments convincing? What exemplars were used by police, bureaucrats, and experts? What is the common language of this meeting that constitutes the group as a field?

Within the field of border security experts, the management of the border is understood as a multifaceted policy problem with economic, social and political facets. There has been securitization of the issue sector—there is no doubt that the border is a security issue—but the particular policing practices or technologies are often debated within this larger frame. For example, the HSI group differed radically on the scale and nature of the vulnerability of remote border regions. The complexity of the concept of audience within securitization is also well illustrated by this ethnography. Within an expert panel, who is the primary or important audience: bureaucrats, scientists, elite politicians, representatives of

the community? One technician took a zero-tolerance approach to illegal border crossings, intentional or accidental; in contrast, one working police officer took a much more contextual approach to enforcements, stressing the intentions of border crossers. This finding corresponds with earlier work on Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBETs), which demonstrated that practical working co-operation among police forces on both sides of the border was built on informal relations rather than abstract policies driven by the federal government. In these cases, the securitization of the border was accepted by some and refuted by others, which complicates the story of securitization theory considerably. Thus, while border security and the perception of border security are both primary drivers of policies, there are also internal pressures for efficiency, accountability, risk management, inter-agency competition and bureaucratic cultural clashes. This supports the contentions of IPS scholars, such as Bigo and Guild (2005), Bigo (2006), Scherrer (2010) and others, that individuals, careers, professional networks—all of the agents and structures that constitute a field—must be accounted for in explanations as to what security policies are adopted.

Threat Images

Threat naming is an important discursive tool in the process of securitization. In the case of the US–Canada border, the speakers included in this research consistently identify the potential entry of terrorists into the United States as a significant threat to national security. Nearly all of the statements examined in this research either named explicitly or implicitly terrorism as the major threat requiring increased intensity of border controls between Canada and the United States. In the few cases where terrorism is not explicitly named as the primary threat related to this issue, it makes up much of the larger context in which the US–Canada border is discussed. That is to say, references to increased border security are premised on claims that terrorism is the greatest threat to American and global security.

Few incidents of international terrorism have occurred on American soil, but this remains a persistent concern in the discourse. The argument that the threat continues to be an important one is rarely explicitly justified. In the instances where the speakers do provide some logic to support the claim that the United States is still threatened by the possibility of a terrorist attack (presumably by international terrorists), they make references to specific events that have occurred elsewhere in the world. “Thankfully, we have not experienced another attack on our soil since September 11, 2001. But the rest of the world has not been so fortunate. If you ask residents of Madrid, or Beslan, or Bali, or Jakarta, they will

assure you that not only the threat, but also the harsh daily reality of terrorism is ongoing” (DHS, Feb. 16, 2005).

This logic indicates that the speaker equates several terrorist attacks without distinction based on social, economic, political or historical contexts. Removing these events from the contexts in which they have occurred allows the speaker to claim that they may be replicated in the United States. When a member of the HSI panel questioned the utility of a new system for tracking small marine craft on inland waters and, in particular, asked what the threat to Lake Champlain was, a bureaucrat responded “Mumbai.” No further explanation of the similarities between India–Pakistan and Quebec–New York relations was offered; the example was presented as an obvious conclusion.

In addition to the failure to qualify the term “terrorism,” as well as the weak logic used to justify its persistence in the discourse, the threat remains vague as the speakers acknowledge the countless uncertainties that surround it. Aside from one reference to the suspicion that a terrorist attack will most likely come in the form of a land vehicle armed with explosives—a suspicion that is not further justified in the statement, and that is followed by the acknowledgement that there is very little to support this claim. At no point do any of the speakers attempt to legitimate the concern surrounding the threat of terrorism by providing more specific details about potential or hypothetical attacks. In some instances, speakers explicitly state that there is no way of knowing who might attempt to attack the United States, nor how, when, or where this might be carried out. Despite this, the speakers maintain that what is certain is that the threat remains and that complacency is a weakness that those hypothetical potential terrorists will certainly seek to exploit.

Since September 11, 2001, we have gone on the offensive against the terrorists. We have dealt the enemy a series of powerful blows. The terrorists are on the run, and we’ll keep them on the run. Yet they’re still active; they’re still seeking to do us harm. The terrorists are patient and determined. And so are we. They’re hoping we’ll get complacent, and forget our responsibilities. Once again, they’re proving that they do not understand our nation. The United States of America will never let down its guard. (Bush, June 9, 2005).

They claim that the terrorist threat persists and that terrorist organizations are plotting constantly against the United States, waiting only for an opportunity to strike. “America, in this new century, again faces new threats. Instead of massed armies, we face stateless networks; we face killers who hide in our own cities. We must confront deadly technologies. To inflict great harm on our country, America’s enemies need to be only right once” (Bush, Dec. 17, 2004). The speakers call for vigilance as they argue that the terrorists need only be right once

in order to succeed, while the United States can never falter under any circumstances.

While the speakers acknowledge that the threat of terrorism is uncertain, they speculate the hypothetical forms that future attempts at terrorist attacks on the United States might take. Calls for the development and implementation of new detection technologies and techniques are accompanied by claims that future attacks may be attempted using biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. "Weapons of mass effect, such as nuclear, chemical and biological, call for the rapid deployment of next generation radiation detection equipment at every port of entry" (DHS, Jan. 13, 2005). Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) detection equipment is thus argued to be critical to border security as it "is an integral part of the DNDO comprehensive strategy to address the threat of nuclear and radiological terrorism" (DHS, Feb. 7a, 2005). With such a vague and inclusive conception of the threat of terrorism, this creates the possibility to discuss the importance of many fronts in attempts to protect against it. Border controls are thus presented as a critical layer, among many others, used in securing the United States against future terrorist attacks. These elite concerns about WMD and cyber-terrorism are again entirely absent from the front-line border workers and representatives of civil society. While the inherent vulnerability of a complex, open society and the corollary, complex, open borders, is well-understood, the specific high-impact threats of infrastructure collapse are far removed from the concerns of border guards or recreational watercraft users. Threat images are the premise of the securitization argument and, in the absence of a consensus on threat, the risk and resultant emergency are hard to agree upon. The threat images at the elite, bureaucratic, and popular levels are inconsistent and contradictory.

Terrorism Dominating the Discourse

In the discourse analyzed in this research, it is apparent that discussions of security at the border are dominated by terrorism as the primary threat. What happens in these statements with regards to threat-naming is two-fold. First, the threat of terrorism is presented as trumping all others. Second, terrorism collapses all other ills into a generalized threat category. In many cases, the statements do not acknowledge the existence of threats other than terrorism. That this is the most prevalent border-related threat discussed in the discourse, and the only one discussed independently of others, outside general claims that the United States is in a state of insecurity, indicates that the political climate from which these statements have been pulled is one in which terrorism is highly prioritized. In the case of the US–Canada border, then the threat of terrorism trumps concerns about other illegal activities.

Furthermore, discussions of the threat of terrorism overshadow concerns surrounding favourable activities such as trade and tourism. Throughout the discourse examined here, threats are at times presented in opposition with desirable cross-border activity. The speakers included in this research stress the importance of facilitating positive activities, such as legitimate travel and trade. Where trade is discussed, there is a significant emphasis on the importance of the Canadian market to the United States and vice versa. The speakers included in this research make it clear that prosperity is collective and thus must be sought through combined efforts to facilitate trade.

Much of the discussion regarding trade revolves around the tension between trade and security. While trade has often taken precedence in discussion of the US–Canada border, the discourse analyzed here reveals that the climate increasingly prioritizes security. Statements released by DHS on December 17, 2004, with regards to Smart Borders, and on January 25, 2005, regarding the US-VISIT program, illustrate efforts to give the impression of a reconciliation between the seemingly conflicting priorities: trade and travel facilitation and increased security. “At the heart of the Smart Borders process is the recognition that public security and economic security can be achieved simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing. Pre-clearance at the land border is an excellent example of how the United States of America and Canada can advance the dual objectives of security and facilitation” (DHS, Dec. 17, 2004).

The demonstration of the ability to uphold simultaneously these priorities is central to appeasing both those who are concerned about security’s impact on economic endeavours and those who are concerned that a focus on trade and travel facilitation will undermine the country’s security. So, while favourable cross-border activities are still included in the discourse, they remain within a context of security, often directly referring to protection against terrorists.

In a few cases, the speakers associate the US–Canada border with other threats to American security. What occurs, however, when these other threats are presented is that they are placed under the umbrella of “criminal activity.” This term may be used alone, allowing the listener to define it or characterize it in the way he or she will. At other times, however, those activities which fall under this category are named explicitly, but often in a single breath. These activities include drug smuggling, human smuggling, illegal immigration, document fraud, visa violations, criminal cross-border travel and terrorism. Grouping these together allows the speakers to maintain the prevalence of terrorism as a threat, while reaching additional stakeholders and intensifying feelings of insecurity by associating it with others. That the threat of terrorism dominates the discourse is not exactly a surprise, but it is worth noting empirically within this discourse.

Assessing and Expanding Security

The speakers discuss the successes and shortcomings of existing border security policies while making recommendations for future courses of action. The speakers present these elements in a number of ways, ranging from the very general to the very specific, but they are not necessarily consistent or coherent throughout. Consequently, what we see in both the expert panel and the elite discourse is that specific policies and general strategies become part of the rhetorical calculus of the securitizing move. Better (if not perfect) security could be assured if the border were sealed, but that cost outweighs the benefit. So, the policy tools and practices that are suggested as the remedy to insecurity and risk play an important role in the sociological process of audience acceptance (Salter, 2008).

The stated goals of specific border security policies, of border controls in general, and of the larger security project are presented by the speakers in often very broad terms. The most commonly stated goal is simply to improve security (DHS, Jan. 13, 2005, Feb. 7, 2005b.). The purposes of border control activities are discussed more specifically in some cases with the presentation of referent objects and identification of the types of persons or behaviours targeted by these practices: “criminals,” “illegals” and “terrorists,” in general (Bush, Dec. 20, 2004, March 23, 2005; DHS, Feb. 7a, 2005). When the speakers discuss the accomplishments of recently implemented border security policies and practices, at times they simply provide general claims that the border or the territory is “more secure” without describing from what threat the United States is more secure (DHS, Feb. 14, 2005). In some cases, they also name those whom border control practitioners and other law enforcement agencies have denied entry into the United States or apprehended. Some statements include specific figures of those undesirables intercepted by these agencies. For example, DHS discusses repeatedly the results of the implementation of the US–VISIT program. “The United States has been able to arrest or deny admission to 372 criminals or immigration violators because of US–VISIT. These included federal penitentiary escapees, convicted rapists, drug traffickers, individuals convicted of manslaughter and credit card fraud, a convicted armed robber and numerous immigration violators and individuals attempting visa fraud” (DHS, Jan 3, 2005).

The descriptions of those apprehended or denied entry range from specific, as in the quote above, to more general. For example, DHS has stated that the US–VISIT program has been responsible for the denied admission of “more than 407 people” (Jan. 25a, 2005) or on another occasion that, “more than 400 criminals and immigration violators have been stopped at our borders” (Feb. 7b, 2005). In all but one case (DHS, Feb. 17, 2005) where the speakers discuss those who have been denied entry,

there is no mention of attempted entries by (would-be) terrorists. In short, there are no data to make these statistics legible. This is a question routinely faced in all of the public cases of the use of statistics, whether a reduction of negative outcomes is a result of good policy, accident or poor measurement.

Border controls are described as successful, but always insufficient. The majority of the occasions where the speakers state that border controls are incomplete or inefficient consist of general claims that insecurity remains. Statements made by both President Bush and DHS claim that “we are not safe” (Bush, Dec. 4, 2004; DHS, Feb. 7, 2005b). These statements are not followed by claims that the existing policies are inappropriate to the concerns surrounding the border, but rather that they are simply insufficient. The claims that insecurity remains are on occasion made more specific than the general statements discussed above through the identification of particular dangers—again, most often listing those deemed to be criminals, illegals and terrorists—that continue to threaten the integrity of the US–Canada border. We must understand these statements to be part of the securitizing process, naming not the threat, but the condition of risk. The more generalized the risk, the wider the scope for new security practices.

Following claims that the current border controls are insufficient to adequately address the dangers associated with land ports of entry, the speakers make general or specific recommendations for future courses of action. In the most general cases, the speakers state simply that more needs to be done. In some cases, the speakers argue that the existing policies need to be expanded or supplemented by other measures. None of the statements contains claims that any existing policies require revision or termination. The recommendations proposed by the President and DHS do not represent a departure from existing policies and practices. The speakers generally call for measures such as increases in the number of border patrol agents, improvements in personnel training with regards to newly implemented technologies, as well as increases in intelligence collection, storing and sharing (Bush, Jan. 26, 2005, Feb. 2, 2005; DHS, Dec. 17, 2004b, March 16, 2005, April 5b, 2005). At the HSI panel, the specific focus was to collect the community reaction to two new technologies for border control, particularly in remote areas of the US–Canada border. Discussion ranged from the general threat environment, which might justify greater restrictions of rights and freedoms to the targeted technologies. However, as with the public discourse, there was an implicit consensus that more and better security was needed at the border, and that it was self-evident that technology was a force-multiplier.

It is important at this point to examine the level of coherence between the four elements explored above. In terms of the level of specificity of the factors discussed under each of these headings, it is clear that each

contains significant amounts of generalities. The stated goals are primarily discussed in a general sense, which corresponds to all other elements presented here. The successes are discussed with the most specificity, but the specific details included are only presented alongside more general statements that claim that border controls have increased security. What is important to note is that, given the general nature of the majority of these statements, there is a clearly coherent logic followed by the speakers when presenting the stated goals, how existing policies address these goals and what needs to be done to successfully achieve them. At the same time, however, the majority of these statements provide very little content and thus the measures presented, as well as their purposes and results, remain quite vague. The shortcomings of existing policies, and thus the justification for the expansion or implementation of new policies remain unclear. The recommendations put forth to address these shortcomings also remain largely undefined. It is thus difficult to identify the logic adopted by the speakers in this case and consequently to evaluate the soundness of this line of reasoning.

Where the discourse becomes more specific, the stated goals do correspond coherently to the stated successes of existing policies. The speakers claim that the implementation of border controls (including specifically listed policies) is intended to impede the entry of certain undesirables (also at times listed explicitly). These undesirables are revisited in the successes and remain consistent, with one flaw. The logic between stated goals and policy successes is interrupted by the absence in the latter of specific reference to terrorist interdictions. Terrorists are mentioned in discussions of policy successes but only in a general sense. That is to say, speakers claim that the border controls put in place have succeeded in making it more difficult for terrorists to gain access to the United States. This success is not reflected, however, in the much more specific statements that list explicitly the types of exclusions and arrests that have been made through those policies.

Anomalies

Exemplars are crucial to the language of a field. Within the field of border security, a number of tropes, incidents and narratives are often used as historical or policy short-hands to represent key political values or policy lessons learned. The INSPASS/NEXUS programs, for example, are understood by practitioners and policy makers to be solid policies that reduce the inspection load for a number of known and “safe” passengers who cross the border frequently and with minimal risk. However, it is also commonly accepted that the extremely low sign-up rate for NEXUS is due to perceptions of the cost of the privacy invasion is

high and a lack of infrastructure at the border reduces the benefit of facilitation. Thus, at the HSI panel, a new tracking technology for personal marine craft was dismissed as another NEXUS program, without having to elaborate these common understandings; it could be effective, but would be undersubscribed. At similar mid-level bureaucratic and public meetings, widespread skepticism about sign-up has been used rhetorically to question other secure document proposals, such as enhanced driver's licenses (Muller 2008). Exemplars are shorthand for common experiences that help define the field, reinforce the limits of the possible and reinforce bureaucratic or political lessons learned. Our analysis found two striking anomalies: an exemplar that was not used in the discourse and a false exemplar that was repeated as true.

The Millennium Bomber: Ahmed Ressam

Essentially an independent cell for Al-Qaeda, Algerian Ahmed Ressam planned to attack the Los Angeles International Airport on the eve of the millennium, 1999. After a failed bid for asylum in Canada in 1994 and an unexecuted deportation order, he engaged in minor criminality in Montreal until a trip to Afghanistan for training in 1998. Ressam obtained a fraudulent Canada passport using a forged baptismal certificate and a university identity card under the name Benni Norris and flew to the West Coast to launch his attack in December 1999. With a rented van, he used a ferry to cross from Victoria, British Columbia, to Port Angeles, Washington, where he was interdicted by Customs and Border Patrol. He later co-operated with American authorities to reveal that there were Al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the United States and giving evidence later used in post-September 11, 2001, judicial proceedings and military tribunals. While the Canadian authorities had Ressam under surveillance and could track him to the West Coast, they did not (or could not) provide specific intelligence on his intentions or identity to the American authorities. The border guard who stopped Ressam thought that he was smuggling drugs rather than the nitroglycerin and timers that were eventually found in his vehicle.

The case of Ressam vividly illustrates three weaknesses of US–Canada border security: the reliance and vulnerability of passports and other identity documents, the difficulties in international inter-agency communications and the sheer difficulty of providing border security. Ressam passed a primary pre-clearance inspection before boarding the ferry because his fraudulently obtained passport was authentic and the pseudonym could not be connected to his outstanding arrest warrants in Canada.

A number of policy changes and new technologies have been adopted to prevent a repetition of the Ressam profile. Passport Canada eliminated baptismal certificates as a possible breeder document for an appli-

cation and, briefly, increased the rigour of its verification procedures by phoning the guarantors of the applicant. As the WHTI was rolled out, particularly for air travel to the United States, Passport Canada faced increasing delays due to the new rigorous application process, causing a political furor. The agency changed its procedures to cope with the new American requirements. The unilateral WHTI precisely misses the lessons of the Ressam case; it privileges the passport as the primary document of security, even though passport application or security procedures have not radically changed since the Ressam case. In other words, what *should* be an exemplar of the dangers of relying on a passport for the identification of risks is not an exemplar within the policy community.²

While, as will be discussed below, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, remain a persistent point of reference for the speakers included in this research, it is surprising that, with only one exception, there is no mention of the millennium bomber, Ahmed Ressam. Whereas this case could actually be used to illustrate the argument that the US–Canada border might be used as a point of entry for terrorists attempting to gain access to the United States, it remains nearly entirely absent from the discourse studied here. The only exception occurs during a hearing on June 9, 2005, when Secretary Chertoff responds directly to a specific question regarding the incident and what it means for border security between Canada and the United States. Chertoff discusses the case as an isolated incident, arguing further that such an event can only be prevented outside policy and protocol with what he calls the “intuition” of the border patrol agents. In this statement, the Ressam case is not related to the continuously discussed current threat of terrorism and is disassociated from the larger security context. The event that is capable of drawing a tangible link between the threat of terrorist attack on the United States and the US–Canada border has been forgotten in the security discourse examined here.

September 2001, and the Ontario–Vermont Border

The second exemplar is used more in public and political circles, and completely refuted within the professional field. The canard of the Ontario–Vermont border crossers must strongly suggest to analysts that it is insufficient to consider the public discourse without reference to the professional field of experts (Whitaker, 2004–2005). Terrorists responsible for the September 11, 2001, attack did not cross the US–Canada border. The province of Ontario and the state of Vermont do not share a land border. However, both of these stories have been circulated in the American House of Representatives and the American public media (and combated by Canadian diplomatic staff). These two fictitious breeches reinforce a common perception that the Northern border is leaky.

With regards to the threat of terrorism as discussed in the discourse analyzed here, the events to which the speakers most often make reference are the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. There is no explicit link between those attacks and the US–Canada border. Those terrorists did not gain access to the United States due to any failures at the US–Canada border. Furthermore, at no point do any of the speakers included in this research attempt to justify the link between September 11, 2001, and the border in question. This means that the events of that day are presumed to be relevant to the US–Canada border. The speakers do not challenge each other's references to these events, nor do they attempt to illustrate the logic that has brought them to consider the US–Canada border a key front in the war on terror.

Not only are the events of September 11, 2001, referred to in an attempt to securitize the US–Canada border, the date has become a marker for the birth of a new security era. As discussed above, these terrorist attacks are not viewed as an isolated occurrence but rather as indicative of the shape of future threats to American and global security. These two anomalous exemplars suggest very strongly that discourse analysis must be actor-driven, because the reference points in the field of experts may be unexplicated.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the Copenhagen School's securitization theory is insufficient to understanding the process by which the US–Canada border is increasingly becoming considered a matter of security. We maintain that a more comprehensive approach to this process that takes into account not a singular speaker-audience interaction, but rather the discursive activities of a multitude of actors in varying settings will offer a more accurate perspective of the process of securitization. Through a combination of official discourse analysis with participant observations of meetings with experts in the field, we have found two major inconsistencies that reveal that the securitization of the US–Canada border is occurring in a manner that is much more complex than the simple speech-act performance–audience-acceptance model. The first important inconsistency is that of the relationship between truth and discourse. We have found that the statements contain language and arguments, both explicit and implicit, that do not correspond to the realities of the political and historical contexts in which they occur. The second notable finding is that the official discourses differ greatly from the language and priorities of those who are involved in the exercises of security on the ground. While official discourses prioritize the threat of terrorism above all others, those in the field are concerned with the quotidian practices

and policing. Our findings point to an understanding of the securitization process that focuses on multiple speakers in diverse settings adopting different discursive tools and addressing various audiences in an attempt to guide the issue in question further into or out of the realm of security. While the discourses explored here all contribute to the perpetuation of the expanding security agenda surrounding the US–Canada border, it is important to recognize there are variations in the methods by which this activity is exercised depending on speakers and contexts.

Notes

- 1 The findings examined here are consistent with several other conferences and workshops on the themes of security, privacy, counter-terrorism, and border security attended by Salter.
- 2 The authors would like to thank David Grondin and Claire Turenne-Sjolander who suggested that this may be less anomalous than it appears, in the face of an active attempt by Canadian diplomats and policy makers to down play the Ressaym case, or to argue that the Smart Border Agreement and correlate policy changes at Passport Canada had fixed that problem.

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