

The North American Union:  
Conspiracy Discourse and State Sovereignty in the Post-9/11 Era

**John B. Sutcliffe**

Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario  
N9B 3P4  
Tel: 519 253 3000 x.2360  
E-mail: sutclif@uwindsor.ca

**Martha F. Lee**

Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario  
N9B 3P4  
Tel: 519 253 3000 x.2025  
E-Mail: leema@uwindsor.ca

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From the earliest years of their existence, the United States and Canada have been politically, culturally and economically interdependent. The extent of this interdependence has varied but has certainly increased since the 1970s; it has been formally expressed, and enhanced, by the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA) and the subsequent North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).<sup>1</sup> The extent of the interdependence and its implications for the two countries has been and continues to be the subject of considerable political and academic debate in both countries, and it is frequently an issue in national elections in both settings. This is clearly the case in Canada where the relationship with the United States is a perennial feature of both political and popular debates. It is also evident in the United States. In the 2008 Democratic presidential primary elections, for example, both the main candidates (Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton) indicated their dissatisfaction with the terms of NAFTA and threatened to re-open the agreement following their election.<sup>2</sup> This did not, in fact, occur following Obama's 2008 electoral successes in both the primaries and the presidential election itself. Indeed, in February 2011 President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper jointly announced that they are launching negotiations with the aim of establishing a border perimeter that will further enhance the two countries' interdependence with the aim of boosting security, trade and employment in both countries.<sup>3</sup> This announcement led to their joint signature of an Action Plan in December 2011 establishing a series of priorities aimed at improving the efficiency and ease of border crossings between the two countries for trusted travellers and shippers.<sup>4</sup>

Interdependence and integration are therefore central features of the United States-Canada relationship and this has attracted criticism on both sides of the border. This criticism frequently develops relating to specific policy sectors or issues within sectors. It is, for example, often stated that free trade generates unemployment through the loss of manufacturing jobs. Some criticism, however, is wider in scope and claims that an evil force is behind North American integration. This paper examines these types of criticisms: the idea of a "North American Union." A small but vocal number of commentators argue that the governments of the United States, Canada and Mexico are secretly negotiating the unification of the three states in a North American Union (NAU). Part of this secret plan, according to many of these commentators, is the creation of a NAFTA 'superhighway' and a single currency, the 'amero', to replace the three existing

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bow, Brian (2009). *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence, and Ideas in Canada-U.S. Relations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press and Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2009). *Finding the Balance: Shared Border of the Future*. Ottawa: Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>2</sup> Ibbitson, John (2008). "Clinton and Obama vow to reopen NAFTA," *Globe and Mail*, February 27.

<sup>3</sup> Alberta, Sheldon (2011). "Harper, Obama tout border revamp," *Windsor Star*, February 5.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Canada and the Government of the United States (2011). *Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness*. Ottawa/Washington DC: Government of Canada/Government of the United States. See also Curry, Bill (2011). "Canada, U.S. set to usher in border changes," *Globe and Mail*, December 7, p.A4; Gotlieb, Allan and Robertson, Colin (2012). "How to get that border deal just right," *Globe and Mail*, January 5, p.A17.

national currencies.<sup>5</sup> This paper does not assess the verity of these claims, but instead examines the roots of these ideas and their prevalence in both the United States and Canada. Because the Canada-U.S. relationship is one of “asymmetrical interdependence” (Canada depends more heavily on the United States than the United States on Canada),<sup>6</sup> fears relating to North American integration would be more likely to be present in Canada than in the United States. This is not, however, the case.<sup>7</sup> In the United States, this theme is more pronounced, both in political discourse, and in popular culture. The paper argues that the literature on conspiracy theory helps to explain their emergence and their greater prominence in the United States as compared to Canada. In addition, conspiracy theory’s infiltration of American popular culture has allowed it spread across the political spectrum and even into mainstream political platforms.

### **Conspiracy Thinking and Popular Culture**

The word “conspire” means “to breathe together,” and its connotation—men and women invisibly but intimately connected—fits the word’s usage across the centuries. Historically, the term referred to individuals coming together to engage in a “criminal, illegal, or reprehensible” plot,<sup>8</sup> and connoted a small number of participants secretly collaborating to bring about a nefarious end. Conspiracies were understood to be limited in aim and scope, and speculation about them was likewise constrained. This conceptualization of conspiracy, however, evolved in the twentieth century. With globalization, individuals’ perceptions of the scope of political life expanded, and so too did conspiracy thinking. Through the work of the twentieth century’s most influential conspiracy theorist, Nesta Webster, the content of conspiracy theories became less local and more international, and its structural architecture became more elaborate and complicated.<sup>9</sup>

In his analysis of modern conspiratorial thinking, Michael Barkun distinguishes between these ways of conspiracy speculation. He contrasts “event conspiracies” and “superconspiracies,” and this distinction clarifies how conspiracy thinking changed during the course of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Barkun argues that event conspiracies are theories that concern a single event, for example, the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the moon landing, while superconspiracies are conspiratorial ideologies that identify a single malevolent force at work behind a network of organizations attempting to consolidate control of all meaningful political and economic activity in some type of nefarious plan, for example, a supposed plot create a New World Order. Typically, superconspiracies identify shadowy masterminds behind these plans as mysterious groups

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<sup>5</sup> Capling, Ann and Nossal, Kim Richard (2009). “The Contradictions of Regionalism in North America,” *Review of International Studies*, 35:147-67; Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Bow, Brian (2009). *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence, and Ideas in Canada-U.S. Relations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

<sup>7</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.151.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Martha F. (2011). *Conspiracy Rising, Conspiracy Thinking and American Public Life*. Westport: Praeger/ABC CLIO, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Martha F. (2005). “Nesta Webster: The Voice of Conspiracy,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 17(3): 80-104.

<sup>10</sup> Barkun, Michael (2003). *A Culture of Conspiracy, Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 3-4.

such as the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, and the Illuminati. Every superconspiracy identifies its own combination of conspirators; a small sample of the most popular of these includes specific individuals in the American government, Saudi oil interests, Jews, lizards in the center of the earth, extraterrestrial spirits invading human bodies, Osama bin Laden's Masonic connections, and a business lobby of "Freemasons loyal to the Zionists." In the case of North American Union conspiracy theories, those responsible are often identified as agents of the New World Order, a shadowy umbrella organization that is hypothesized to include various combinations of actors, including American presidents, the CIA, the banks, vaccination providers, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Freemasons, Illuminati, and Bilderberg Group.<sup>11</sup> Belief in a single event conspiracy theory might indicate a suspicious mind, but belief in a superconspiracy theory can have significant political implications. Their logical outcome is either political apathy or extremism.<sup>12</sup> While social scientists might sometimes ignore conspiracy theories, or identify conspiracy believers as irrational<sup>13</sup> and/or not worthy of attention, conspiracy theories reflect a particular set of interpretations about the political world, and in that way, they influence their believers' actions. They are therefore generated by political conditions and often have a political impact.

North American integration has political, economic, and social implications. The increasing interdependence and integration of North America are for some, promising developments. Others, however, experience this process as a threat. Increased political cooperation might be understood as dependence; increased efficiencies for government and business can be understood and experienced as job insecurity; and relaxed borders can be understood as security threats and immigration problems waiting to happen. Conspiracy theories are a response to these complex insecurities. They provide believers with definitive explanations and remedies.

The appeal of a worldview wherein a single malevolent force controls all human action through its evil minions might seem questionable to most of us, but to a significant group of people, this way of thinking is a comfort. Conspiratorial thinking assumes that it is possible for human beings to shape the world to their will, that is, to "make" history. In environments where rapid change is occurring, it is reassuring to believe that it is possible for an action to have pre-determined and specific consequences (that is, that conspirators can predict the implications of their actions). In this way, the negative consequences of globalization, and in this case specifically North American integration, are experienced as part of someone, or some group's plan, a more reassuring way to interpret the world than to live with the sense that no one is to blame, and no one is in control.<sup>14</sup> While Canada and the United States have a longstanding political and economic relationship, it is within the last twenty years that it has most significantly

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Icke, David (nd). "The Horrific New World Order Master Plan that has Full UN Approval," <http://www.davidicke.com/articles/new-world-order-mainmenu-67/64676-the-horrific-new-world-order-master-plan-that-has-full-un-approval>, accessed May 25, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, Martha F. (2011). *Conspiracy Rising: Conspiracy Thinking and American Public Life*. Greenwood: Praeger/ABC CLIO.

<sup>13</sup> It could be argued, for example, that Richard Hofstadter's classic essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (*The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), does this.

<sup>14</sup> Lee, Martha F. (2011). *Conspiracy Rising: Conspiracy Thinking and American Public Life*. Greenwood: Praeger/ABC CLIO, p. 12.

expanded and developed; this period, as will be discussed, coincides with a more general rise of conspiracy theory in the United States.

### **Interdependence and Integration in North America**

The idea of a North American Union has its roots in the long-standing links between Canada and the United States. These links are evident in the extent of the economic interdependence between the two countries as well as the degree to which this interdependence has been prompted by, and helped to prompt, formal integration.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this is the world's largest bilateral trading relationship with approximately \$577 billion in goods and services crossing the Canadian-US border each year, and approximately 10 million jobs in the two countries depending on this trade.<sup>16</sup> The institutionalization of trading agreements between the two countries in the shape of the 1965 Auto Pact and then subsequently the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement has contributed substantially to this growth in economic interdependence. The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade reports that, "two-way trade has tripled" since 1989 and under the North American Free Trade Agreement "growth in bilateral trade between Canada and the U.S. has averaged almost 6.0% annually."<sup>17</sup> In addition to the growth in trade, recent decades have also witnessed increased interconnection of entire industries across the border through growing integrated supply chains and inventory management.<sup>18</sup> This is, for example, particularly evident in the auto industry.

There is therefore no denying the economic importance of the Canada-U.S. bilateral economic relationship. It is necessary to note, however, that although the economic relationship with Canada is important for the United States – Canada is the largest export market for 37 of the 50 U.S. states and is also the United States' largest external oil supplier<sup>19</sup> – it is considerably more important for Canada.<sup>20</sup> This is evident, for example, in the much greater percentage of Canadian exports going to the United States as compared to the percentage of U.S. exports going to Canada. In 2010 Canada was the United States' top destination for merchandise exports, representing 16.5% of all U.S. exports.<sup>21</sup> In the same year, however, the United States received approximately 75%

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<sup>15</sup> Keohane, Robert and Nye, Joseph (1989). *Power and Interdependence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: HarperCollins.

<sup>16</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (2008). "The Canada-U.S. Trade and Investment Partnership."

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Sands, Chris (2009). *Toward a New Frontier: Improving the U.S.-Canada Border*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings; and Alberts, Sheldon (2011). "Harper, Obama tout border revamp," *Windsor Star*, February 5.

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Chamber of Commerce (2009). *Finding the Balance: Shared Border of the Future*. Ottawa: Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>20</sup> See Bow, Brian (2009). *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence, and Ideas in Canada-U.S. Relations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press; Donohoe, Thomas and Beatty, Perrin (2011). "Stronger Canada-U.S. oil ties are a win-win," *Globe and Mail*, April 14.

<sup>21</sup> United States Census Bureau (2010), *Foreign Trade Statistics*. <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top1012yr.html>. Accessed April 2011.

of Canadian merchandise exports.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Canada consistently runs a trade surplus with the United States; in 2008 this surplus stood at C\$89.1 billion

This disparity in the relative economic importance of the two partners to each other is one reason that the relationship has been described as one of ‘asymmetrical interdependence.’<sup>23</sup> In terms of economic weight, military might, demographic size, and the size and importance of its cultural industry, among other factors, the United States dwarfs its northern neighbour. Pierre Elliott Trudeau famously told an American audience that, “Living next to you is like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.”<sup>24</sup> This asymmetrical interdependence has resulted in a long-standing and on-going debate in Canada about the dangers to Canadian sovereignty imposed by its relationship with the United States and the level of economic and cultural interdependence.<sup>25</sup> These concerns can be dated all the way back to the formation of Canada and concerns about the possibility of U.S. manifest destiny resulting in expansion into Canadian territory. As early as 1891, the historian Goldwin Smith argued that Canada was likely to be subsumed by the United States.<sup>26</sup>

These fears have been expressed even more prominently in the years since the negotiation of the CUSFTA and NAFTA. Critics of these agreements have made the claim that they will result in ever-greater Canadian dependence on the United States and a consequent weakening of Canadian sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> The then leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada, Ed Broadbent, expressed strong opposition to NAFTA arguing that, “within a quarter century, we could be absorbed totally, lock, stock and barrel, if this is not stopped.”<sup>28</sup> The Council of Canadians is a citizens’ advocacy group founded in 1985 and which has opposed the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, and a process it describes as ‘deep integration’ that it sees

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<sup>22</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (2011), “Merchandise trade by country.” <http://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste>. Accessed April 2011.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Andreas, Peter (2005). “The Mexicanization of the US-Canada Border: Asymmetric Interdependence in a Changing Security Context,” *International Journal*, 60(2): 449-62; Clarkson, Stephen (2002). *Uncle Sam and US: Globalization, Neoconservatism, and the Canadian State*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Bow, Brian (2009). *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence and Ideas in Canada-US Relations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Speech to the National Press Club in Washington, 1969 – Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Canada (2011). *Canada and the World: A History*. <http://www.international.gc.ca/history-histoire...> Accessed April 2011.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Clarkson, Stephen (2002). *Uncle Sam and US: Globalization, Neoconservatism, and the Canadian State*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Laxer, James (2004). *The Border: Canada, the US and Dispatches from the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*. Toronto: Anchor Canada.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, Goldwin (1891). *Canada and the Canadian Question*. London: MacMillan.

<sup>27</sup> See Orchard, David (1998). *The Fight For Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism*. Westmount: Robert Davies Multimedia; Bolt, Clarence (1999). *Does Canada Matter? Liberalism and the Illusion of Sovereignty*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press; Hurtig, Mel (2002). *The Vanishing Country: Is it too Late to Save Canada?* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; Sutcliffe, John B. (2010). “Critical Interpretations of Integration in North America and the European Union,” in Finn Laursen (ed), *Comparative Regional Integration*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 63-82.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Crosbie, John C. (1997). *No Holds Barred: My Life in Politics*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, p. 310

increasing Canadian dependence on the United States.<sup>29</sup> An element of the Council of Canadians' criticisms of the Canadian relationship with the United States is that the process of integration is both on-going and contains a lack of certainty about its end-point.<sup>30</sup> Canadian critics of integration frequently express the concern that NAFTA does not represent the limit of Canadian integration with the United States. Indeed, it is often the prospect of further integration that drives the criticisms; something that has been evident in the period since 11 September 2001.

The attacks of 9/11 sparked a number of immediate and longer-term responses within the United States in efforts to prevent further terrorist attacks. Many of these responses involved tightening security measures at the country's borders, including those with Canada.<sup>31</sup> These measures prompted several agreements between the U.S. and Canadian government aimed at alleviating American security fears but without adding to a 'thickening of the border'. These measures include, among many others, the 2001 Smart Border Accords, the establishment of Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) units at several border locations, and intelligence sharing agreements.<sup>32</sup> In addition to these measures, several commentators have argued in favour of more far-reaching agreements with between Canada and the United States in order to forestall the threat of a further thickening of the border and thus damage to Canada's trading relationship with the United States.<sup>33</sup> Robert Pastor, for example, advocates the creation of a common external tariff and therefore a customs union for the United States and Canada as part of a series of proposals that would lead to the creation of a North American Community.<sup>34</sup> There is at least the possibility that some of these ideas will be incorporated into agreements resulting from the consultation process jointly announced by Barack Obama and Stephen Harper in February 2011.<sup>35</sup> This announcement

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Council of Canadians (2008). *Deep Integration*, 14 May 2008. Access March 2009. <http://www.canadians.org/DI/index.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Sutcliffe, John B. (2010). "Critical Interpretations of Integration in North America and the European Union," in Finn Laursen (ed), *Comparative Regional Integration*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 63-82.

<sup>31</sup> Andreas, Peter (2005). "The Mexicanization of the US-Canada Border: Asymmetric Interdependence in a Changing Security Context," *International Journal*, 60(2): 449-62; Sands, Chris (2009). *Toward a New Frontier: Improving the U.S.-Canadian Border*. Washington D.C.: Brookings; Alden, Edward (2008). *The Closing of the American Border: Terrorism, Immigration and Security Since 9/11*, New York: Harper; Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>32</sup> Morales, Isidro (2008). *Post-NAFTA North America: Reshaping the Economic and Political Governance of a Changing Region*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Andreas, Peter and Biersteker, eds, (2003). *The Rebordering of North America*. New York: Routledge; Konrad, Victor and Nicol, Heather N. (2004). "Boundaries and Corridors: Rethinking the Canada-United States Borderlands in the Post-9/11 Era," *Canadian-American Public Policy*, 60: 9-22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibbitson, John (2009). *Open & Shut: Why America has Barack Obama and Canada has Stephen Harper*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart;

<sup>34</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Pastor, Robert (2008). "The Future of North America: Replacing a Bad Neighbor Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, 87(4): 84-98; see also Dobson, Wendy (2002). *Shaping the Future North American Economic Space: A Framework for Action*. Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute; Rao, S. (2004). "North American Economic Integration: Opportunities and Challenges for Canada," *IRPP Working Paper Series*, no.2004-09a.

<sup>35</sup> Obama, Barack and Harper, Stephen (2011). *Declaration by President Obama and Prime Minister Harper of Canada – Beyond the Border*. 4 February. Washington, D.C.: The White House; Moens, Alexander (2011). "Perimeter step toward more border efficiency," *Windsor Star*, 21 January.

established a working group aimed at exploring several measures to improve U.S.-Canadian trade including the possibility of a border perimeter,<sup>36</sup> and was followed by the Action Plan released in December 2011.

Canadian critics of these developments frequently assert, as with earlier criticisms of integration, that they pose a major threat to Canadian sovereignty. They claim, for example, that if a perimeter approach to security is adopted, Canadian governments will be forced to adopt American policies in areas relating to immigration, refugee status and freedom of information.<sup>37</sup> Again, therefore, critics of this agreement point to the dangers posed by integration with the United States and are particularly concerned by the fact that there is a lack of clarity about the future extent of this integration.

Mainstream opposition to economic integration in North America is also prevalent within the United States. U.S. trade with the rest of the world, including Canada, has grown substantially in recent decades and forms an important part of the American economy.<sup>38</sup> The agreements that have prompted this trade have attracted criticism from politicians and commentators within the United States. On the right, within the Republican Party in particular, critics of North American integration frequently focus on the potential security and cultural threat to the United States posed by illegal immigration that they argue results from integration. These criticisms are most frequently made in relation to the United States' relationship with Mexico, but a number of commentators have also asserted that lack of sovereign control over the U.S.-Canada border represents a significant security risk.<sup>39</sup> Many within the Democratic Party and the trade union movement opposed the North America Free Trade Agreement. These opponents claimed that the agreement lower wages and environmental standards and would result in a loss of jobs to Mexico.<sup>40</sup> NAFTA was also opposed in the 1992 presidential elections by critics on the right such as Patrick Buchanan (who challenged the sitting president George H. Bush in the Republican primaries) and businessman H. Ross Perot who ran as a third candidate. The eventual successful presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, ran on a campaign that supported NAFTA but promised a renegotiation of key elements of the proposed treaty. In the aftermath of the election opposition to NAFTA continued, particularly from Democrats, and the eventual Congressional ratification of the treaty depended on a coalition of Democrats and Republicans.<sup>41</sup> Finally, as noted above, opposition to NAFTA, and trade agreements in general, has continued over the 17 years since NAFTA's entry into force. In 2004, Dennis Kucinich ran as a candidate in the Democratic presidential primaries on a platform that called for

<sup>36</sup> Ibbitson, John, Curry, Bill and Koring, Paul (2011). "Beyond the border talks looms a homegrown debate," *Globe and Mail*, 5 February.

<sup>37</sup> See Ignatieff, Michael (2011). "Don't deal away our sovereignty," *Globe and Mail*, 10 February.

<sup>38</sup> Bow, Brian (2009). *The Politics of Linkage: Power, Interdependence and Ideas in Canada-US Relations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

<sup>39</sup> Andreas, Peter (2005). "The Mexicanization of the US-Canada Border: Asymmetric Interdependence in a Changing Security Context," *International Journal*, 60(2): 449-62; Whitaker, Reg (2004-2005). "Securing the 'Ontario-Vermont Border': Myths and Realities in Post-9/11 Canadian-American Security Relations," *International Journal*, 60(1): 53-70; Lennox, Patrick (2007). "From Golden Straitjacket to Kevlar Vest: Canada's Transformation to a Security State," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 40(4): 1017-1038.

<sup>40</sup> Ginaris, Nicholas V. (1998). *The North American Free Trade Agreement and the European Union*. Westport: Praeger.

<sup>41</sup> Hufbauer, Gary C. and Schott, Jeffrey J. (2005). *NAFTA Revisited: Achievements and Challenges*. Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics.



American withdrawal from NAFTA, and, as noted above, both Democratic candidates in 2008 expressed at least the possibility of reopening NAFTA.

Canada and the United States are therefore closely linked, economically, culturally, and militarily. The breadth and depth of these connections has supporters but has also attracted criticism in both countries. As examined above, this criticism exists within mainstream political discourse but also extends to the fringes where it takes a variety of different forms. The paper now turns to examine the central example of this criticism; the claim that the three independent states of North America are in the process of being replaced by a North American Union.

### **Conspiracy Thinking in the Americas and the “North American Union”**

Within the range of discussion concerning North American integration, conspiracy thinking has become a significant influence at the margins, but has also extended into the mainstream. This blurring of the lines between conspiracy theories and more moderate political discourse has made it difficult for many to distinguish between conspiratorial arguments regarding integration from theories based on evidence, and has facilitated the further expansion of conspiratorial discourse.

Conspiratorialism can, however, be clearly identified. Conspiracy theories identify a single malevolent entity that is directing all meaningful human activity. In superconspiracy theories, this evil force is understood to utilize a multitude of agencies to accomplish its goals. As Barkun points out, this evil centre of power is always understood to be located outside the believer’s “true community”; it is “the Other,” foreign or barbarian in some way.<sup>42</sup> The conspirators govern a hyper-rational universe, in which every wicked intention can be acted upon with precision, and every possible outcome and implication is known. For a variety of reasons, in the early twenty-first century this way of thinking has become particularly popular in the United States, and fear of a proposed North American Union is one of the clearest instantiations of this way of thinking.

The proposition that the interdependence and integration of Canada and the United States is inexorably leading to the creation of a ‘North American Union,’ (NAU) linked by a superhighway and single currency, has become a surprisingly prevalent component of political discourse during the last 15 to 20 years.<sup>43</sup> There is a startling array of websites devoted to this topic (over six million), as well as many commentaries and books, and the common argument that links them is the assertion that the national governments of Canada, the United States and Mexico are secretly preparing to negotiate away their states’ sovereignty in a merger that will create a new superstate.<sup>44</sup> Jerome Corsi, for example, claims that:

the Obama administration is pursuing a stealth bureaucratic methodology to establish a common North American border around the continent, encompassing the U.S., Canada and Mexico, while simultaneously moving

<sup>42</sup> Barkun, Michael, *A Culture of Conspiracy*, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Capling, Ann and Nossal, Kim Richard (2009). “The Contradictions of Regionalism in North America,” *Review of International Studies*, 35:147-67.

<sup>44</sup> See Corsi, Jerome R. (2007). *The Late Great USA*. New York: Threshold Editions; Malkin, Michelle (2002). *Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals, and other Foreign Menaces to our Shores*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing.

to erase the borders between the U.S. and Mexico as well as between the U.S. and Canada.<sup>45</sup>

Corsi argues that “policy makers in the three nations and multinational corporations have placed the United States, Mexico, and Canada on a fast track to merge together economically and politically” and that a North American Union is being created “through a stealthy, incremental process in which our public policy makers are intentionally less than candid about their true intentions.”<sup>46</sup> The conspirators are understood to be operating on a world-wide scale, though other countries are rarely mentioned. Pat Robertson’s 1991 book, *The New World Order*, for example, famously made the claim that a North American Union was one element of a much wider conspiracy that was changing the face of the United States.<sup>47</sup>

Each variant of the North American Union conspiracy theory alludes to the forces working behind the government. Some, for example, suggest it is a cabal of bankers and Jews, some that it is the Council on Foreign Relations, and some that it is a shadowy collective known as the “New World Order.” In each of these variations, the villains at the top are working clearly and deliberately to destroy Americans’ freedoms and their constitutional rights. A major underlying theme of these arguments is that this supposed project is being undertaken secretly, and that its provisions violate the very assumptions upon which the American government is founded.

The purported new superstate will take control of a large number of policy areas that were previously the sole responsibility of the independent states, including, for example, the natural resources, security decisions, and particularly immigration policies for the new union. The website “USA Survival,” for example, highlights that this plan suggests that one of the conspirators’ first strategies is to create a common legal framework among the three states, including “proposals for a North American Court of Justice (with the authority to overrule a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court), a North American Trade Tribunal, and a Charter of Fundamental Human Rights for North America, also dubbed the North American Social Charter.”<sup>48</sup>

According to the conspiracy theorists, one of the most critical elements of this plan is the replacement of the three national currencies with a single currency, the Amero. Its name clearly modelled on the European Union’s euro, the idea of the Amero embodies the possibility of the United States losing control of its monetary policy, and its capacity to act an independent economic actor.<sup>49</sup> Many conspiratorialists, already concerned about what they see as the American government’s debt, see the current financial situation as a crisis that is pivotal to the future of the United States. Cory Burnell, a founder of the American group Christian Exodus, for example, has stated the Amero is key to a larger

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<sup>45</sup> Corsi, Jerome R. (2010). “Premeditated Merger, Obama Quietly Erasing Borders,” WorldNet Daily, December 15, <http://www.wnd.com/?pageId=240045>, accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Corsi, Jerome R. (2007). *The Late Great USA*. New York: Threshold Editions, xii.

<sup>47</sup> Robertson, Pat (1991). *The New World Order*. Dallas: World Publishing.

<sup>48</sup> America’s Survival, Inc. (nd). “Evolution by Stealth, how ‘North American Integration’ Can Lead to a North American Union,” [http://www.usasurvival.org/ck3.09.07.shtml#\\_edn1](http://www.usasurvival.org/ck3.09.07.shtml#_edn1), accessed May 24, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Russell, John (nd) “The Amero Conspiracy,” [http://forextrading.about.com/od/forexhistory/a/amero\\_conspiracy.htm](http://forextrading.about.com/od/forexhistory/a/amero_conspiracy.htm), accessed May 29, 2012.

conspiratorial project, one world government, “with one fiat currency created and controlled by the world’s power brokers for their own benefit.”<sup>50</sup>

These conspiratorial fears of an impending North American Union have developed in part as a result of (deliberate) myth-making and as a result of a misreading of actual government decisions such as the creation of NAFTA. As Capling and Nossal note, for examples, the claims that a North American superhighway is being created seem to stem from misunderstanding of transportation companies’ support for improved highway links within North America and their web-site posting.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Pastor asserts that the idea of a North American Union is “not just false, it was preposterous.”<sup>52</sup> At the same time, these views have also been encouraged by agreements reached post-9/11 such as the Security and Prosperity Partnership and the more recent ‘Beyond the Border’ discussions about a security perimeter, as well as academic and business proposals for closer links between Canada, the United States and Mexico.<sup>53</sup> Critics of a North American Union point to reports by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives as examples of ‘secret’ reports produced by an alliance of government and business, which aim to integrate North America.<sup>54</sup> The 2005 report of the *Task Force on the Future of North America*, which was itself sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, is frequently used by believers in a North American Union as an example of this type of secret report.<sup>55</sup> This report made a series of recommendations for the governments of the United States, Canada and Mexico including calling for the establishment of a common security perimeter, a common border pass and better border infrastructure in order to allow for the freer flow of people within North America.<sup>56</sup>

Conspiracy theories relating to a North American Union also frequently draw attention to the work of Robert Pastor, a former U.S. national security advisor and vice-chair of the *Task Force on the Future of North America*. In several works, Pastor has advocated for closer ties among the three North American states including recent proposals that will help develop a North American Community.<sup>57</sup> Critics claim that Pastor is a prominent, and influential, example of an activist who is seeking to move the

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Cory Burnell, September 2007, cited in Sweet, Joanna and Lee, Martha F. (2010).

“Christian Exodus: A Modern American Millenarian Movement,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4(1):1-23, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Capling, Ann and Nossal, Kim Richard (2009). “The Contradictions of Regionalism in North America,” *Review of International Studies*, 35:147-67.

<sup>52</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2001). *Toward a North American Community: Lessons From the Old World for the New*. Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Canadian Council of Chief Executives (2004). *New Frontiers: Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada-United States Partnership in North America*. Ottawa: Canadian Council of Chief Executives. Information on the Council on Foreign Relations is available at <http://www.cfr.org/about/> (accessed 25 April 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Manley, John P., Aspe, Pedro, and Weld, William F. (chairs) (2005). *Building a North American Community*. Washington DC: Council on Foreign Relations.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2001). *Toward a North American Community: Lessons From the Old World for the New*. Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics; Pastor, Robert A. (2008). “The Future of North America: Replacing a Bad Neighbor Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 87(4): 84-98; Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

governments of North America, by stealth, towards a union. In the words of Jerome Corsi: “If Pastor has his way, the economic, legal, and executive capacities of Mexico, the United States and Canada will fuse in such a way that a North American community develops. Such a community depends upon the diminishing of national identities....”<sup>58</sup> It is sometimes even argued that this North American Union will result in a totalitarian regime that will rescind constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, and result in untold human misery,

**we are being betrayed from within.** You cannot rely on the elite media to tell you that there are **AT MINIMUM** 23 million invaders/insurgents already here. The reason our government does **nothing** to enforce our laws and secure our borders is because our government is rife with global elites who are working assiduously to achieve a communist inspired One World Order (OWO) and **the open borders are part of the plan**. Chaos will eventually reign, martial law will be enforced, the Bill of Rights and our Constitution will evaporate, our sovereignty and Republic will end as the global elites take over and reign supreme.<sup>59</sup>

As extreme as these views may appear, opposition to a purported North American Union has appeared within more mainstream political debate.<sup>60</sup> In September 2006, for example, the US Congress passed a joint resolution: “Expressing the sense of Congress that the United States should not engage in the construction of a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Superhighway System or enter into a North American Union with Mexico and Canada.”<sup>61</sup>

Fear of a NAU is evident, but far less prominent in Canada. Kevin Parkinson’s “Global Research” web-site, for example, asserts that Canadians “are completely unaware of [the] looming North American Union,” an arrangement the author argues will result in Canadian resources being controlled by the government of the North American Union. Despite its reference to the North American Union, the nature and grounds of Parkinson’s argument differ from American conspiratorialists’ concerns:

If our citizenry allows the North American Union to come into existence, then our way of life will change drastically, for the years to come. With privatization of our resources, increased foreign ownership, and a Canadian government with less and less authority, our children and grandchildren will become ‘North Americans’ and our quality of life will drastically decline.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Corsi, Jerome R. (2007). *The Late Great USA*. New York: Threshold Editions, 44. Corsi compares Pastor to Jean Monnet and the role played by Monnet in the development of European integration.

<sup>59</sup> Peterson, Daneen (nd). “Illegal Alien Anarchy,” <http://www.stopthenorthamericanunion.com/Dots.html>, accessed May 30, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>61</sup> House of Representatives (2005-2006). H.Con.Res.487.IH, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, Washington DC.

<sup>62</sup> Parkinson, Kevin (2007). “Canadians completely unaware of looming North American Union,” accessed 10 April 2011 at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=6346>.

The form of Parkinson's interests is mirrored in the campaigns of number of other Canadian organizations, including the Council of Canadians. As noted above, this citizens' group has campaigned against a process that it describes as 'deep integration' with the United States. It asserts that deep integration will lead to:

the dismantling of the border between Canada and the United States. It could affect everything – the economy, social programs, resources and the environment. Deep integration is the harmonization of policies and regulations that govern the foods we eat, the items we buy, and how we live. It calls for the formation of a new North America that effectively erases the border between Canada and the United States in the interests of trade north of the border and security south of the border.<sup>63</sup>

In campaigning against this integration process, the Council of Canadians has called for popular opposition to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) and recently, the proposed perimeter security plan.<sup>64</sup> Various local chapters of the Council of Canadians make the case that these measures will ultimately lead the establishment of a North American Union. The Vancouver Council of Canadians, for example, argues that: "Unless we can get the government to change course, it is just a matter of time until Canada is dissolved into a 'North American Union.'"<sup>65</sup>

Intuitively, it would seem that fear of a merger into a larger political union would be more prominent in the smaller states (in this case Canada) given the underlying context of asymmetric interdependence. Study of the ideas relating to a North American Union indicate, however, that these fears are more prominent and more intensely expressed in the United States as compared to Canada, even allowing for the different population sizes.<sup>66</sup> There are several explanations for the prevalence of the North American Union idea and why it is particularly prominent in the United States. One relates to the failure of North American leaders, and particularly American presidents, to widely promote the benefits of integration in North America. Instead, presidents have frequently bowed to the demands of vocal opponents of integration and/or have preferred that negotiations relating to the U.S.-Canadian border occur outside the glare of public opinion.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, U.S. leaders reflect and foster the deeply rooted isolationism in the United States.

At the same time, the North American negotiations that do occur and the agreements that are reached help to create the impression that North American integration is an ongoing process with a lack of clarity about what the end point of the agreements will be. The Beyond the Border Action Plan, for example, sets out priorities and builds on

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<sup>63</sup> Council of Canadians (2011). "Deep Integration," accessed 21 April 2011 at <http://www.candians.org/DI.index.html>

<sup>64</sup> See Council of Canadians (2011). "Tell the Harper government you oppose its perimeter security plan," accessed 25 April 2011 at <http://www.canadians.org/action/2011.SecurityPlan.html>

<sup>65</sup> Vancouver Council of Canadians (2011). "Deep integration – details," accessed 25 April 2011 at <http://www.vancouvercouncilofcanadians.ca/>.

<sup>66</sup> See Pastor, Robert A. (2011). *The North American Idea: A Vision of a Continental Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

pilot projects and previous agreements but does not definitively establish how the U.S.-Canada will operate in the future. As a result, the fact that North American integration is an ongoing process is used by proponents of the North American Union conspiracy to claim that the negotiations and agreements have the potential to challenge fundamentally state sovereignty and identity. In this sense, these groups and individuals are influenced by, and use, the fear of the unknown.<sup>68</sup>

A third explanation for the prevalence of the North American Union idea in the United States is the prevalence of conspiracy theory in that country. The vision of a North American Union can clearly be distinguished from critiques of integration from more mainstream groups across the political spectrum. These views criticise particular elements of integration or the consequences of closer links with other countries. Conspiratorial views, on the other hand, see integration as being entirely malevolent and are often apocalyptic in tone. They also purport to offer a complete explanation of all social, political, and economic life, and they typically too, identify mysterious groups such as “The New World Order” and/or bankers, the Illuminati or Freemasons as either the force behind this conspiratorial effort or the minions of the real mastermind. Notably, these theories most often relate their claims to the fundamental principles of the Constitution and American identity.

While the media might suggest that the prevalence of conspiracy thinking in the early twenty-first century is a unique feature of this era, this is not the case. Conspiracy theories become a prominent part of political discourse during periods of profound political, economic, and social upheaval, a tendency that supports a Gramscian analysis of popular culture that interprets a nation’s popular culture as one place in which the struggle between a state’s dominant and subordinate groups is played out.<sup>69</sup> Conspiracy theories that concern political and economic life have risen to the level of public discourse in what might be described as periods of significant hegemonic change. This pattern can be seen in the discourse of late 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the interwar years of the twentieth century in Great Britain, and in the United States in the post-Cold War years.<sup>70</sup> While the emergence of conspiracy theory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is interesting and important (during this period, the Illuminati first emerged as a central focus of conspiracy theories), the early twentieth century experience in Britain is most comparable, in terms of the democratic political environment, the nature of the change under consideration, and the way in which conspiracy theory functioned in the mainstream political realm.

As noted above, the structure of conspiracy theory changed definitively in the early twentieth century when amateur historian and conspiracy theorist Nesta Webster propagated the first true superconspiracy theory; her argument that a complex conspiracy was behind the decline of the British Empire provided a new way to talk about conspiracies in a globalizing world. Generated by her concern for social, economic, and political change that was occurring in Britain, Webster argued that a complex conspiracy

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<sup>68</sup> In this way, opposition to North American integration has similarities with Euroscepticism and opposition to integration in Europe. See Sutcliffe, John B. (2010). “Critical Interpretations of Integration in North America and the European Union,” in Finn Laursen (ed), *Comparative Regional Integration*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 63-82.

<sup>69</sup> Storey, John (2003). *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Lee, Martha F. (2011). *Conspiracy Rising: Conspiracy Thinking and American Public Life*. Greenwood: Praeger/ABC CLIO.

comprised of Jews, Grand Orient Masonry, Theosophy, Pan-Germanism, International Finance and Bolshevism was working together to overthrow Britain and all of “Christian civilization.”<sup>71</sup> For Webster, the relevant political world extended far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, and her second major innovation to conspiracy theory was to incorporate this international element into the architecture of her conspiracy theory. Webster’s writings were influential in her own time – Winston Churchill used her writing in his speeches<sup>72</sup> – and her ideas continue to circulate today.

Webster’s superconspiracy architecture moved to the United States in the early twentieth century, but it was in the mid-twentieth century, via Robert Welch and the John Birch Society that it became popular. While Welch was originally content to identify Communists as the major threat to America, his reading of Nesta Webster allowed him to expand his original theory to incorporate a complex of global villains. Secret conspirators – including the Bavarian Illuminati – were behind the Communists<sup>73</sup> While political events eventually overtook a conspiracy theory that featured the U.S.S.R. as a major actor, political events of the late twentieth century did prepare the ground for new conspiracy theories to emerge in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

One might identify a general practice of government secrecy and real government cover-ups (for example, illegal activities by the CIA and FBI), as practices that sustained some Americans’ faith in conspiracy theories, and a number of high profile and sudden deaths that became anchors for specific event conspiracy beliefs. As conspiracy theories exist today, however, Webster’s and Welch’s conspiratorial views remained influential. Almost without exception, modern American superconspiracy theories, such as those concerning the North American Union, assert that the conspirators are engaged in activities that are international in scope and that the conspirators control the government. These theories reflect concerns regarding the uncertainty of the international environment, as well as the fear that in the context of that uncertainty, the government is engaged in activities that are outside the interests of its own citizens. In the words of Daneen Peterson, an anti-North American Union activist:

Today I will reveal to you the betrayal of the American people by a government cabal who are bent on destroying our sovereignty in order to create a North American Union. The miscreants include many who function at the highest levels in our government. Many hold membership in the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the Trilateral Commission and pursue a subversive agenda. The cabal is deliberately circumventing the U.S. Congress and ‘We the People’ in blatant violation of our Constitution. Collectively they are committing **TREASON**.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Webster, Nesta (1924). *Secret Societies and Subversive Movements*. London: Boswell, pp. 391-401.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Churchill, Winston (1920). “Zionism versus Bolshevism,” *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, February 8, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> Welch, Robert (2000) “The Truth in Time,” reprinted in *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*. Appleton, Wisconsin: Western Islands Publishers, p. 173.

<sup>74</sup> Peterson, Daneen (2007). “About the NAU – What You Don’t Know CAN Hurt You,” Speech, Washington, D.C., June 14, <http://www.stopthenorthamericanunion.com/WhatYouDontKnow.html>, accessed May 30, 2012.

The literature on conspiracy theory therefore suggests good reasons for the prevalence of conspiracy thinking in the United States at this historical moment, and in turn those reasons also provide insights into why Canadian discussions of North American integration may often be critical of the process, but are not conspiratorial in the same way or to the same degree. While there are historical conditions that have helped to foster the current appeal of conspiracy theory in the United States (including the extra-legal behavior of a number of government agencies and a number of high profile assassinations in the latter half of the twentieth century), a deeper explanation is found in a consideration of the relationship of political speech and political power.

At their most fundamental, conspiracy theories are theories of power. They are explanations – however skewed – of how power is perceived to work in the world. In this way, they have a fundamental connection to the wider sweep of human political life that is reflected in their popularity at particular moments in history. As discussed above, they tend to become a more preeminent part of public discourse during times of significant change and political instability. This was true at their emergence in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and through the interwar years in Great Britain periods of time that roughly coincide with hegemonic change in the international system. They appear within states and regions whose hegemonic power may be shifting, and where social, economic and political life is changing rapidly.

These conditions also obtain in the United States through the last two decades. From the fall of the U.S.S.R., and the disappearance of the bipolar international system onward, uncertainty has been a consistent theme in American politics, and this environment has fostered a specifically American version of conspiratorial thinking. One of the most significant incidents of this time period, the events of 11 September 2001, exhibits how conspiracy theory is related to this large-scale political change. Conspiracy theories regarding 11 September 2001 can be broadly categorized in three groups: those that blame Jews, those that blame some combination of classic conspiratorial villains (for example, the Illuminati), and those that identify the American government itself as behind these attacks on the United States. The latter category of conspiracy theory is by far the most influential. A 2006 Scripps Howard poll found that 36% of Americans believed that their government had either engineered the attacks or knew about them in advance, and did nothing to stop them.<sup>75</sup> Even more striking is that a later international poll suggests that on average, even in countries across the Middle East, citizens in other countries are much less likely to believe the American government was involved.<sup>76</sup> Such widespread belief that one's own government is actively involved in murdering its own citizens is troubling. From the perspective of the history of conspiracy thinking, however, such a belief can be understood as the result, in part, of American hegemony and its decline. While from one perspective this conspiracy theory reflects suspicion of government, from another, it reflects an assurance that one's country and government are sufficiently powerful enough to determine and stage such an attack, and a denial that

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Hargrove (2006). "Third of American Suspect 9-11 Government Conspiracy," *Scripps News*, August 1, <http://www.scrippsnews.com/911poll>, accessed May 11, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland (2008). "International Poll: No Consensus on who was Behind 9/11," [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international\\_security\\_bt/535.php?lb=&pnt=535&nid=&id=](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/535.php?lb=&pnt=535&nid=&id=), accessed May 11, 2011.



others – even non-state entities – might be powerful enough to harm United States targets.

The North American Union conspiracy theory is a similar type of response to hegemonic change. The process of globalization is destabilizing,<sup>77</sup> and for American citizens, who are most used to a powerful government that provided stability, this situation creates for some the need for a meaningful explanation. Like the 11 September conspiracy theory, the North American Union conspiracy is therefore the expression of those within a state that is accustomed to hegemonic political power in the international system. Although its immediate genesis was as a response to uncertainty and the emergence of a more multipolar world, its assumptions are those of the powerful, and its content advocates for policy choices that reflect a world wherein the United States was singularly most powerful.

This understanding of the North American Union conspiracy theory illuminates why it has received only limited attention in Canada, where concern regarding North American integration has typically been expressed in more moderate ways and in more mainstream venues. Canada and Canadians have a long history of living with the “asymmetrical independence” that defines their relationship with the United States. The power differential between the two countries is a given, and Canadians seem to have no illusions about their government’s capabilities. As a result, even fringe ideologies express concerns regarding integration in a fundamentally different way. The Canadian Action Party, for example, proclaims that it is

... dedicated to the principle that Canada can best serve its citizens and the world by re-claiming and maintaining its political and economic sovereignty as an independent country.

It is opposed to the ascendancy of “corporate rule” and those aspects of unrestricted global investment that promote colonization of the world’s smaller powers and in Canada's case its absorption by the United States of America.<sup>78</sup>

Anxiety regarding Canada’s position in an increasingly globalized world is expressed in terms of retaining sovereignty in the face of “unrestricted global investment,” not in terms of conspiratorial intervention. In this way, Canadian political discourse reflects the country’s history as a middle power. Canadians are used to dealing with the realities of limited influence and political compromise, and as a result, perhaps have a kind of protection against the sweeping apocalyptic dramas prophesied by conspiracy theories.

## **Conclusion**

Canada and the United States are economically, socially, culturally and politically interdependent and integrated, if to differing degrees. While this is fostered by

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<sup>77</sup> Cerny, Philip G. (1999). “Globalization and the Erosion of Democracy,” *European Journal of Political Research* 36: 1-26; O’Dowd, Liam (2002). “The Changing Significance of European Borders,” *Regional and Federal Studies* 12(4): 13-36; Creveld, Martin van (1999). *The Rise and Decline of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Canadian Action Party, “About Us,” <http://actionparty.ca/about/>, accessed June 4, 2012.

government and private actions, it also generates opposition in both countries. The depth and intensity of this opposition varies over time, with increased intensity evident during periods of economic recession or while new agreements are being negotiated, and with location, with different criticisms raised in different countries or different parts of each country. There are also different types of opposition to integration with some expressed within the political mainstream that are critical of particular elements or consequences of integration. Other types of opposition take the form of radical rejection of integration as it exists or, more frequently, as it is perceived to exist.

Claims that a North American Union is in the process of being created is one example of this type of critical belief system. According to advocates of this perspective, North American governments (or the people or groups controlling these governments) are secretly planning to institute a single North American government, linked by a superhighway and a single currency, which will replace the current North American states and their existing political systems. This belief is an example of a superconspiracy whereby its proponents perceive a single malevolent entity controlling all human activity. Conspiracy theories have deep roots within U.S. politics and society and this helps explain the greater prominence of the belief in an approaching North American Union within the United States as compared to Canada. It is further argued that periods of political, economic and social change increase the prominence of conspiracy theories. This again helps to explain the prominence of the NAU conspiracy in the United States. As with Great Britain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, citizens within the United States are living through a time when it appears that hegemonic power is shifting. In this period of uncertainty, a significant number of individuals find solace in the idea that change can be explained and that someone or something can control political life.

It is easy to dismiss the North American Union conspiracy theory as an irrational flight of fancy. The 'evidence' used to support this belief system is to say the least questionable and is at best a misreading of actual developments. Ignoring these views is a mistake, however. These may be the views of a minority but they are nonetheless a significant minority in the United States and their beliefs have occasionally found their way into mainstream political debate and have the capacity to influence the ongoing 'Beyond the Border' debates. In addition, conspiracy theories can generate political action on the part of their proponents with sometimes devastating consequences. In the case of the NAU in particular, they represent a worldview that is rooted in power, and apprehends that power's decline.

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