

## US-Canadian Border Fence

Difficulty:

**DIFFICULT**

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### *Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson*

Today's report was about a project to construct a fence along the US-Canada border. How long is this border? How is it controlled today? What are the reasons behind the project? How do Canadians feel about it?

### *Extension discussion topics*

#### **A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text**

*Introduction = What did you learn about the US-Canada border and the US project concerning it? How does the US justify its ideas?*

1. What do we learn in the report about the border itself?
  - 6,500 km long.
  - Longest unfortified border in the world.
  - In many places no physical barrier (as in the report) - just warning signs.
  - Contains "ports of entry" (customs checkpoints) along roads.
2. What plans does the US have for the border? How does it justify them?
  - To fence portions of it (either side of specific, remote ports of entry).
  - To upgrade patrol roads, install short-range radars, more cameras and aerial drones.
  - The justification is the US "war against terrorism" since 9/11. Also that the security threat is constantly changing and that its agencies must adapt.

Do you think that the technological measures being studied are reasonable or excessive?  
The US Customs and Border Protection Agency says that it is listening to public comment and that no decision will be made before next year at the earliest. Do you believe this?

3. What are public reactions to the plans?
  - The plans are "raising eyebrows" in both countries.
  - There is quite a lot of negative reaction which the agency is trying to contain, ... for example by public meetings to explain its ideas.
  - These meetings reassure some concerns (aerial drones, wildlife migration) - case of Caroline Correa.
  - The Canadian legislator seems upset that the plans were published without consultation of the Canadian government.
  - The Canadian journalist seems surprised that they appear during talks between the two governments.

**B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text**

*Topic = Border controls.*

1. We learn in the report that the "Canadian government is deep in talks with the Obama Administration about a joint North American security pact", and that "the idea is to tighten controls around the perimeter of the two countries, allowing freer mobility across the shared border". What are the entry requirements for visitors to the USA? (visa, biometric passport, personal details supplied to the airlines, ...) How do they compare to entry requirements for visitors to Canada?
2. Why should Canada accept tighter restrictions?
3. Canada is a major tourist destination. Would tighter restrictions have an effect on the number of tourists to Canada?
4. What political or commercial pressure could the USA exercise on Canada to oblige it to tighten its border controls?

**C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text**

*Topic = For or against a tightening of Canadian border controls.*

Working with a partner or with your teacher list the arguments that Canadian politicians might have for or against a possible tightening of its border controls (one, the arguments for, the other, the arguments against). Then, using these arguments, debate the US demand for Canada to tighten its controls in the framework of a joint security pact.

Arguments for	Arguments against
Along with all civilized countries, Canada must play its part in the "war against terrorism".	No real risk of terrorism in Canada, so no need.
Risk of terrorists using Canada as an entry route into the US.	Canada needs and encourages immigrants – tighter controls would discourage them.
Need to maintain good diplomatic, political and trade relations with Canada's "good neighbor", the US.	Canada is an important tourist destination – tighter controls could discourage tourism and have a negative effect on the economy.
	Tighter controls could infringe civil liberties and create a "big brother" society.
...	...

## Audioscript

The United States and Canada share the longest unfortified border in the world. But is change a-comin'? A planning document describing possible security enhancements is raising eyebrows both in Canada and in the United States. Most notably, a study, for the department of Homeland Security, raises the idea of fencing short portions of the northern border. Some Canadians are offended by the idea. The US agency is now trying to contain the negative reaction. Let's go to the border town of Blaine, Washington, for more details.

I'm standing now right on the US-Canada border, having approached from the US side, across a playground. Just across the line is a pretty much completely unremarkable neighborhood in Canada. There's no fence, just this kind of shallow ditch and some warning signs saying that you're leaving the United States. I can literally just jump across - now I'm in Canada, and jump right back - and we're back in the US.

But border jumping may become a more acrobatic exercise after an environmental review by the US Customs and Border Protection Agency. The planning document contemplates erecting short stretches of fencing on the northern border. Also up for discussion are upgrades to patrol roads, short-range radar, more cameras and aerial drones, among other things.

But it was the fence that caught the locals' attention the most, says British Columbia legislator Barry Penner, who represents a district along the border.

"It is a disappointing development to think that, after all these many years of being good neighbors, one side or the other might think it's necessary now to build a fence."

In response to those sentiments, the US Border Agency is trying to tamp down fears. Customs and Border Protection planner Don Beckham says the agency has no intention of building a fence like the steel curtain it erected along parts of the US border with Mexico.

"We do discuss fencing, but it would be more at very specific locations like the fencing on either side of a small, remote port of entry to keep people from literally driving through the fields to avoid the port of entry."

Beckham says it would be totally unrealistic to try to deter illegal crossings by fencing the entire 6,500-kilometer-long US-Canada border. His team favors a flexible approach that uses a broad array of possible security measures.

"We are looking forward five-to-seven years, understanding that the security threat is not static, that it is constantly changing and Customs and Border Protection needs to change the responses to meet the threat."

Beckham says his agency is listening to public comments and won't make any decisions until next year, at the earliest.

Bellingham, Washington, resident Caroline Correa came to a public meeting with concerns about aerial drone surveillance and how border fencing might block wildlife migration.

"But it seemed to be minimal, if I'm hearing correctly. That's a comfort level and we would have to make certain that they hold their word."

Vancouver Sun newspaper columnist Vaughn Palmer finds it ironic the discussion of fencing came up just as the Canadian government is deep in talks with the Obama Administration about a joint North American security pact. The idea there is to tighten controls around the perimeter of the two countries, allowing freer mobility across the shared border.

"Since 9/11, that cross-border relationship has changed in any number of ways, and we're going to be struggling to reconcile the security concerns in the United States with the trade and tourism interests between the two countries."

For a long time to come, it seems.

For VOA News, I'm Tom Banse, near the US-Canada border in Blaine, Washington.