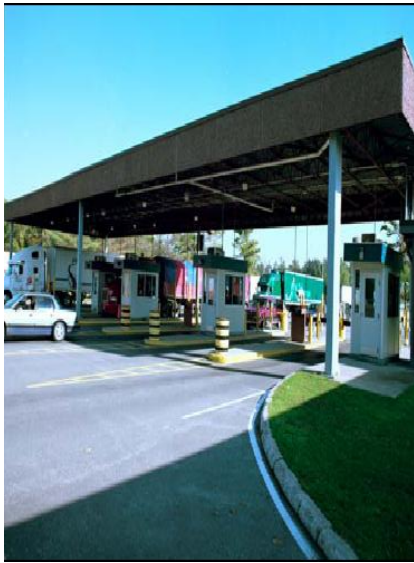




.....Issue 63

BORDER SECURITY MATTERS



December 2011
borderpol@borderpol.org

scott.newark@borderpol.org



BORDERPOL CONFERENCE OCTOBER 16-7 2012 (LONDON)

1. The Americas

Uncertainty over details of Canada-US border agreement raises privacy concerns
Auditor General finds serious screening deficiencies in Canadian immigration screening
Sophisticated tunnel found on US-Mexican border
Wildfires in US linked to illegal border crossers
Foreign fronts set up in Canada to export prohibited materials
Flight school ignores visa rules to facilitate immigration in California
[Details of Canada-US Beyond the Border Accord released](#)
Former Canadian Senate report raises border security issues
Cross border enforcement issues for RCMP and CBSA
Canada moves to revoke fraudulently acquired citizenship
Canada to scrutinize 'diplomatic' passports from Arab Spring countries
An explanation for drop in US border apprehensions?
Los Zetas gaining control at Guatemalan border
Leaked details of Canada-US border deal plans regarding small ports of entry repudiated by Minister Toews
China supplied border radar systems for Ecuador not working
Cargo container tracking technology sought for expedited border clearance
Federal immigration authorities to screen Arizona inmates

2. Europe

Serbia and Kosovo reach border agreement
Russia promotes new customs unions
Russia creates its own visa 'blacklist' of US officials
Russia reaches border trade deal with Georgia to eliminate WTO hurdle
EU Court restricts asylum seeker return rules within EU

3. Africa and the Middle East

Syrian Army planting mines at Jordanian border
Ghanian airport security supervisor arrested in heroin smuggling ring

4. Asia Pacific

Another human smuggling boat stopped heading to Australia
Failed Afghan refugee seeker returned from Australia
Australian Hizbut Tahrir leader has passport seized in Jordan
Indonesia arrests Iranian human smuggler
Australia loosens detention policy for asylum seekers
Canada and US to take UN approved Pakistani asylum seekers
China, Thailand, Laos and Burma conduct joint Mekong river patrols
NK shoot illegal border crosser at PRC border
NK warns SK about...Christmas lights at the border
SK asks China to return illegal NKs to South Korea
Ship carrying scores of illegal migrants sinks off Indonesia's Java island
China deploys UAVs to monitor NK marine border



Borderpol – The World Border Organization

BORDERPOL, the World Border Organization, announce the launch of their first annual BORDERPOL Conference and Exhibition for Border Management, Security and Migration Professionals

The first BORDERPOL Annual Conference and Exhibition will bring together the world's senior policy makers, practitioners and players, in **London, UK, October 16th-17th 2012**, to discuss and debate the current and future issues facing the border management, security and migration management sector.

Controlling and managing international borders in the 21st Century continues to challenge the border control and immigration agencies around the world.

It is generally agreed that in a globalized world that borders are as open as possible, yet threats continue to remain in ever evolving circumstances and situations.

Advancements in technology are assisting in the battle to maintain safe and secure international travel. The border security professional still remains the front line against these threats. The BORDERPOL Annual Conference is a high level 2 day event that will discuss and debate current and future policies, implementation issues and challenges as well as new and developing technologies that contribute towards safe and secure border and migration management. Executive Director of BORDERPOL, Thomas Tass said

“BORDERPOL is the only international organization specifically created in 2003 to provide the world's border management policy makers and practitioners with ongoing opportunities to meet, debate and most importantly generate innovative policies and operational solutions to demonstrably improve trade and traveler processing. BORDERPOL is a unique institution that bridges the communication and consultation gaps that exist between legacy intergovernmental organizations associated with global trade, travel and security. The 2012 BORDERPOL Conference in London will be recalled as watershed event that set the tone for 21st century border security and migration management professionals.”

For further information visit: www.borderpol-event.org

BORDERPOL® - The World Border Organization, is a 21st Century body dedicated to improving border security and standardizing international procedures and processes. Recognizing the need for the establishment of a global home to over 1000 border related services BORDERPOL was officially registered in March 2003 as a non-profit international association in Canada with its General Secretariat located in Ottawa. In concert with the EU Secretariat in Budapest opened in 2005 and the Asia Secretariat established in India in 2011, BORDERPOL facilitates co-operation and consultations among likeminded border services and related agencies.

BORDERPOL is governed by its Constitution and senior representatives from national border policing services provide policy oversight to the organizations Executive through the BORDERPOL Exploratory Committee (BEXCOM).

Representatives to BEXCOM:

United Kingdom (UK Border Agency, Ports Police)
New Zealand (Department of Labour, Immigration Service)
Republic of South Africa (South African Police Service Border Division)
Hungary (National Police Service)
Peoples Republic of China (Public Security)
Norway (National Police Service)
Republic of Maldives (Department of Immigration and Emigration)
Singapore* (Immigration and Checkpoints Authority)
United States of America* (United States Border Patrol)
Azerbaijan*(State Border Guard Service)
Burundi (Ministry of Public Security)

*observer members

Neil Walker, Events Director

BORDERPOL

Email: neil.walker@borderpol.org

For exhibition and sponsorship opportunities contact:

Tony Kingham, Communications Director

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8144 5934

E-mail: tony.kingham@worldsecurity-index.com

In partnership with Torch Marketing and KNM Media (www.WorldSecurity-index.com)

1. The Americas

Border deal fuels concerns in Canada

November 29, 2011- Toronto Star- Les Whittington

OTTAWA—Armed U.S. police officers will for the first time be allowed to operate in Canada along with the RCMP as part of far-reaching changes in Canadian-American border operations to be unveiled next week by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Barack Obama.

The joint action plan to be announced at the White House will also break new ground by introducing exit-entry records that will track the movements of everyone who leaves the United States or Canada, with the information available to authorities in both countries.

In the months and years ahead, the deal between Ottawa and Washington will reshape security, travel and commercial arrangements at the border in a variety of profound ways — some of which have already raised alarms among Canadians.

The agreement, which has been the subject of confidential negotiations since last winter, is intended to reverse the economically damaging border tie-ups that have been growing since Sept. 11, 2001, while upgrading anti-crime and anti-terrorist security for both countries.

In contrast to the silence from Canadian negotiators, some U.S. officials have been open about what the new reality at the border will look like in the years ahead.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder revealed last fall that the deal will authorize Canada and the U.S. to designate officers who can take part in police investigations on both sides of the border. The pilot project, Holder said, will improve the two countries' ability to deal with the "unprecedented" threats along the border from terrorists, human smugglers, illegal firearms traffickers and drug dealers.

The model for the joint policing program is the Shiprider project, a three-year-old plan under which the RCMP and U.S. Coast Guard join forces and ride in each others' vessels when patrolling boundary waters.

As part of the measures to improve security and streamline border practices, the Beyond the Border blueprint is also expected to include greatly increased information-sharing between Canada and the U.S., including the exit-entry plan.

This secretly devised shake-up of border operations has sparked widespread concerns.

"It's contemptuous of Canadian citizenry to unveil a program in which we've had essentially no input," said Micheal Vonn, policy director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association.

"This process has really been conducted behind closed doors. We've had no white papers, no reports — nothing that we could point to to say, 'Here are the pros and cons, here are the drawbacks, here are the things we are considering,'" she said.

Vonn said the call for comment by Foreign Affairs earlier this year was not a real consultation, because it was based on the loosely worded framework agreement for a border overhaul signed by Harper and Obama in February — not the actual pact negotiated in the months since by officials from Ottawa and Washington.

Still, Foreign Affairs' consultation exercise drew 1,000 individual responses, nearly half from Canadians who opposed further integration of cross-border law enforcement. Exchanging more

personal data across the border also worried individuals who responded to the proposed Canada-U.S. deal.

“Their submissions generally questioned the need to share more information, and they sought assurance that any information sharing would be governed by Canadian privacy laws and that practices and procedures would respect the due process of law and Canada’s civil liberties,” according to a summary of the submissions compiled by Foreign Affairs.

These fears have been underscored by the federal privacy commissioner’s office, which told Foreign Affairs “the experiences of many Canadians in recent years at border crossings and airports highlight ongoing concerns over the protection of privacy rights while travelling.”

This has ranged from increased instances of individuals being delayed, detained or denied entry to the United States to “the tragic rendition of a Canadian citizen to torture in Syria,” the commission said, in a reference to Maher Arar. The Syrian-born Canadian citizen was held and tortured in Syria after being detained and sent there in 2002 by U.S. authorities. “Maher Arar, despite having been cleared of any wrongdoing in Canada, remains on the U.S. no fly list to this day,” the commission said in its June submission.

Assistant privacy commissioner Chantal Bernier said it’s crucial that the agreement include measures that give Canadians a recourse to challenge or correct personal information in border data bases that they believe to be erroneous.

“In any agreement, Canadian privacy protections and practices need to be protected,” Bernier added. “For instance, if there is a lower standard or higher standard of privacy at play, the higher standard has to win out. And in general, our sovereignty needs protection as this unfolds.”

Another question, she said, is whether the U.S. gives as high a priority to protecting personal information as Canada, which has a privacy watchdog reporting directly to Parliament. “The United States does not have a privacy commissioner,” she noted in an interview.

Stuart Trew, trade campaigner with the Ottawa-based Council of Canadians, said further integration of Canada and U.S. police operations is worrisome at a time when Canadians are still waiting for the establishment of recommended controls on information-sharing by Canadian police and intelligence agencies.

“The mechanism for holding the U.S. agents accountable is vague,” he said of the joint policing project included in the border deal. “It’s difficult to know how you would file a complaint, for example, against a U.S. agent and whether there is any accountability in that respect.”

Government officials point out that the joint policing plan will be modelled after the Shiprider cross-border marine policing plan, which requires a Canadian officer to be in charge when the team of mixed U.S. and Canadian police are operating in Canada, and vice-versa on the American side.

“The Prime Minister and the president did say that, of course, even though we would be cooperating in certain areas, our respective jurisdictions and laws would apply, whether that’s our law here, the Charter, etc., or Canada’s privacy rules,” said Andrew MacDougall, a spokesperson for Harper. “Each country would respect its standards on that front. You can look for greater cooperation while respecting our own national laws and standards.”

Besides security, the agreement expected to be announced in Washington on Dec. 7 will cover a wide range of measures on border infrastructure, harmonized product standards, intelligence-gathering and commercial transport.

In a major step to ease border congestion, U.S. officials say next week's deal will authorize pilot projects in the Ontario cities of Sarnia and Fort Erie for pre-screening of cargo before it reaches nearby U.S. customs facilities. By inspecting shipments away from the border, officials hope that most of the pre-cleared trucks could move quickly through customs when crossing into the U.S.

The agreement is also expected to earmark \$1 billion for investment in improved border posts, call for harmonized information requirements on both sides of the border and improve trusted travelers programs such as NEXUS.

Auditor general finds 'disturbing' cracks in Canada's visa approval system

By **Robert Hiltz**- [Postmedia News](#) Nov 22, 2011 –

OTTAWA — An auditor general's report has found 'disturbing weaknesses' in the way Canada's border and immigration agencies hand out visas.

In his report released Tuesday, Interim Auditor General John Wiersema says the Canada Border Services Agency and Citizenship and Immigration Canada lack the guidance, training and information to properly determine who should and shouldn't be let into the country.

"We've been reporting some of these problems with visas for 20 years, and I find it disturbing that fundamental weaknesses still exist," Wiersema said.

The report states the two departments focus most of their energies on defending cases where they have denied an individual entry into Canada — a small percentage of applicants — rather than on reviewing the cases of people allowed entry into the country.

The watchdog's report says more than one million applications were processed for individuals seeing temporary residence within Canada and more than 300,000 for individuals applied for permanent residence in 2010 alone.

Yet, of the three manuals officers rely on to determine admissibility and hence, grant a visa, two had not been updated for several years.

There are also worrisome gaps in the information available to officers about security, health and safety risks to Canadians.

"[Immigration] and the CBSA lack the necessary tools and information to provide assurance that risks related to the admissibility determination process are properly managed," the auditor general's report says.

According to the report, the immigration department has yet to implement the improvements it developed after the last audit, issued more than a decade ago.

The report states that visa officers, the primary officials tasked with assessing whether someone can enter Canada, rely heavily on information provided by the person applying for a visa. This is problematic, the report says, since face-to-face interviews are rarely conducted because of the time and resources they require.

Another area of concern involves the medical screening performed on visa applicants. The auditor says officials have focused on preventing entry to Canada by those infected with two diseases, syphilis and tuberculosis, for the last half-century.

But “today 56 diseases require national surveillance in Canada,” the report says. “CIC has not reviewed whether foreign nationals should also be subject to mandatory testing for some of these diseases.”

The report says officials are often unable to determine the credibility of documents provided by some security agencies in foreign countries. Applicants must provide security checks from every country they have lived in for six months or more during the 10 years previous to applying for entry into Canada.

Almost two-thirds of visa officers surveyed by the watchdog said the inability to confirm details provided by applicants was a hurdle to determine the legitimacy of a visa application.

Furthermore, about half of the officials said they lacked sufficient information to determine whether an applicant was a security risk if allowed into Canada.

Neither immigration nor CBSA have conducted formal reviews of the available information from the RCMP and Canadian Security Intelligence Service to ensure they had access to enough data for assessing the security risk of an individual.

Since the CBSA’s creation in 2003, the department hasn’t signed an agreement with either the RCMP or CSIS to ensure full access to all of the necessary information. Without such an agreement, there is no guarantee officials will receive all of the information they require.

Neither of the departments responsible for allowing people past Canada’s borders have in place a system to review applicants who have already been admitted into the country. This means the vast majority are never followed up on, the auditor general concludes.

The audit was performed between January 2010 and April 2011.

Drug tunnel called 1 of most sophisticated

Passageway starts just west of Tijuana airport and ends in Otay Mesa

Written by Sandra Dibble

San Diego Union-Tribune

12:54 p.m., Nov. 29, 2011 Updated 9:50 p.m.

A drug tunnel discovered Tuesday between Tijuana and San Diego was described by U.S. authorities as one of the most elaborate ever found beneath the U.S.—Mexico border. The passageway, the second major one uncovered in the past two weeks, connected a warehouse in Mexico to another in Otay Mesa.

"It's one of the most sophisticated tunnels we've ever discovered," said Lauren Mack, spokeswoman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "It's got a number of features that were used to facilitate the smuggling." She said details of the tunnel's construction would be forthcoming Wednesday.

The tunnel's exit was discovered Tuesday morning by members of the San Diego Tunnel Task Force inside a warehouse near the end of Cactus Road.

On the Mexican side, police and military authorities hours later traced the tunnel's start to a white, unmarked warehouse just southwest of the A.L. Rodriguez International Airport in Tijuana.

Mexican soldiers guarded the entrance to the tunnel throughout the late afternoon and into the evening. The warehouse is situated on Avenida Fuerza Aerea, a bustling two-lane street that has a blend of small warehouses, administrative buildings and government facilities, including the military airport and offices for the federal police.

Authorities said the tunnel is about 600 yards long. They declined to specify how much marijuana they have seized in the tunnel or warehouses.

U.S. and Mexican officials have planned news conferences for Wednesday morning and afternoon. This latest tunnel is the seventh major one found in the past five years along San Diego's border with Mexico, Mack said.

With greater enforcement at the border, she said, "We know (the cartels) are going underground and building more tunnels. At the same time, we have a very active task force that's very aggressively pursuing it."

The San Diego Tunnel Task Force includes agents from the Drug Enforcement Administration, ICE, the Border Patrol and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Along the entire U.S.-Mexico border, there have been well over 100 cross-border tunnels found in the past decade, Mack said. Most of them had not been built out completely, she added. On Nov. 15, the tunnel task force culminated a months-long investigation by finding a tunnel in Otay Mesa that was 400 yards long with lighting and ventilation.

U.S. and Mexican authorities confiscated more than 20 tons of marijuana in or near that passageway, which began in a warehouse east of the Tijuana international airport and ended in another warehouse in Otay Mesa.

Gen. Gilberto Landeros, commander of Baja California's Second Military Zone, linked that marijuana stash to the Sinaloa cartel, the largest and most powerful drug-trafficking organization in Mexico.

Authorities discover another border drug-smuggling tunnel in San Diego

By Associated Press, Updated: Wednesday, November 30, 4:08 AM

SAN DIEGO — U.S. authorities have discovered a major cross-border tunnel, the latest in a spate of secret passages found to smuggle drugs from Mexico.

“It is clearly the most sophisticated, major tunnel that we have found in the last five years, perhaps ever,” said Lauren Mack, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in San Diego. More details were expected Wednesday.

The tunnel discovered Tuesday links warehouses in San Diego and Tijuana, authorities said.

Mexican soldiers found the entrance on the south side of the border at a Tijuana warehouse after the U.S. opening was discovered. A photo released by U.S. authorities shows a hydraulic lift inside the Tijuana building.

Mexican soldiers guarded the two-story warehouse near the Tijuana airport as darkness fell. The white building had a broken window that was covered with paper and no exterior sign.

The Tijuana warehouse is on the same block as a federal police office and sits next to a packaging company and tortilla distributor.

The discovery comes less than two weeks after U.S. authorities found a 400-yard passage linking warehouses in San Diego and Tijuana, seizing 17 tons of marijuana on both sides of the border. It was equipped with lighting and ventilation.

As U.S. authorities heighten enforcement on land, tunnels have emerged as a major tack to smuggle marijuana. More than 70 have been found on the border since October 2008, surpassing the number of discoveries in the previous six years. Many are clustered around San Diego, California’s Imperial Valley and Nogales, Ariz.

California is popular because its clay-like soil is easy to dig with shovels. In Nogales, smugglers tap into vast underground drainage canals. Authorities said they found a drug tunnel Tuesday in Nogales, running from a drain in Mexico to a rented house on the U.S. side.

San Diego’s Otay Mesa area has the added draw that there are plenty of warehouses on both sides of the border to conceal trucks getting loaded with drugs. Its streets hum with semitrailers by day and fall silent on nights and weekends.

Raids last November on two tunnels linking San Diego and Tijuana netted a combined 52 tons of marijuana on both sides of the border, ranking among the largest pot busts in U.S. history. Those secret passages were lined with rail tracks, lighting and ventilation.

On Monday, a Mexican man was sentenced to nearly 16 years in prison for his role in last November’s tunnels. Prosecutors described Daniel Navarro, 45, as a significant player in moving marijuana from the San Diego warehouse and sought a 30-year prison sentence.

U.S. District Judge Larry Burns said Navarro, a legal U.S. resident since 1999 who worked as a trucker in Southern California, was “up to his hips” in smuggling the large marijuana loads.

“This is just a gigantic amount of marijuana,” Burns said.

Drug Tunnel Has Secret Elevator, Made to Ship Tons of Narcotics

By LEE FERRAN ABC News Dec. 1, 2011

Federal officials revealed that a drug tunnel discovered Tuesday during a bust that netted 32 tons of marijuana was so sophisticated that it had a secret working elevator, electric lighting, rail cars and hydraulic doors -- but may have been found before smugglers could get the narcotics into the hands of American customers.

The tunnel, ending in San Diego, Calif., is easily the "most sophisticated that we have discovered perhaps ever, but definitely at least in the last five years," Lauren Mack, a spokesperson for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement told ABC News early Wednesday. Authorities described the intricate, 600-yard-plus tunnel, as well as the seizure of 32 tons of marijuana -- value estimated at \$65 million -- at a press conference late Wednesday. But according to ICE special agent Derek Benner, the underground passageway was found before the smugglers could make use of all their hard work.

"From the conditions inside the passageway and our ongoing investigation, we're confident we've been able to shut this operation down before the perpetrators were able to use it for smuggling narcotics," Benner said in a statement. "It's clear though, from the level of sophistication involved, that the criminal organization responsible for constructing this tunnel had very ambitious plans."

The tunnel's discovery was the product of a six-month investigation by several law enforcement agencies, including San Diego's dedicated Tunnel Task Force, along with Mexican authorities, ICE said. A late break in the case came when officials observed a tractor trailer leaving a warehouse in the southern San Diego neighborhood of Otay Mesa. Drug dogs at a border patrol checkpoint in San Clemente, Calif., outside Los Angeles alerted agents to narcotics on board, but, being aware of the larger investigation, the agents allowed the truck to roll through.

It wasn't until the truck arrived at its apparent destination in a Los Angeles suburb and men began unloading its cargo that federal agents moved in, arrested four men and seized nearly 11 tons of marijuana from the truck, ICE said. Another approximately 17 tons of pot was discovered in the Otay Mesa warehouse "wrapped in plastic and stacked neatly on pallets."

On the Mexican side, ICE said the tunnel's entrance was in another warehouse but could only be accessed through a "hydraulically-controlled steel door and an elevator concealed beneath the warehouse floor." At the bottom of the tunnel shaft, federal agents found another three tons of marijuana. Another ton was found "in bundles near the tunnel's entrance," ICE said.

Six suspects were arrested in total in connection with the drug smuggling operation. The tunnel's discovery is the latest in a string of high-profile finds in the war on drugs. More than 75 cross-border smuggling tunnels have been discovered since 2007, ICE said.

Earlier this month, U.S. authorities nabbed 14 tons of marijuana from warehouses connected by a drug tunnel from Mexico to the same south San Diego neighborhood. Just a few days ago a pair of similar tunnels were uncovered in the Arizona border town of Nogales.

Federal officials are "putting a stranglehold on the cartels' ability to smuggle drugs into the United States," said William R. Sherman, acting special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration in San Diego. "Seizing close to 50 tons of marijuana in one month denies the cartels the financial means to continue their operations."

The stranglehold may be hurting the cartels' finances, but apparently not their audacity -- the warehouse on the Mexican side of the border was on the same block as a federal police station, according to The Associated Press.

Wildfires Linked to Illegal Border Crossings, Says Study

Published November 22, 2011

Associated Press

GAO-12-73 November 8, 2011

[Highlights Page \(PDF\)](#) [Full Report \(PDF, 60 pages\)](#) [Accessible Text Recommendations \(HTML\)](#)
<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-73>

The GAO found that 30 of the probed wildfires were linked to illegal border crossers primarily in southeastern Arizona based on what was written in investigative reports. Fifteen were thought to be a signal for help, provide warmth or cook food.

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. – People crossing the southeastern Arizona desert caused at least 30 wildfires in a five year period, found the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress.

A study by Congress' investigative arm that shows investigators have linked 30 fires that erupted in a five-year period in Arizona's border region to people who crossed into the United States illegally — a finding Sen. John McCain says backs up earlier statements he made about undocumented immigrants and wildfires.

McCain said earlier this year that fires are sometimes caused by illegal border crossers, but did not specify which fires he was referring to as blazes scorched the southern and eastern parts of the state. The statements quickly drew criticism from activists who jumped on him for "scapegoating."

McCain and fellow Republicans framed the debate over his statements as a distraction. "I hope this report is a lesson to the activists and public officials that would prefer to engage in partisan character attacks rather than focus the discussion on the vital need to secure our southern border," McCain said Tuesday.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office report was released by McCain's office Tuesday, and came at the request of the senator and fellow Republican Sens. John Barrasso of Wyoming, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Jon Kyl of Arizona in July 2010.

It makes no mention of whether anyone was prosecuted for starting the fires and offers no hard evidence that immigrants were responsible.

The GAO gathered information for the study, which included fires within 100 miles of Arizona's border with Mexico, from the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, and interviewed federal, state and tribal officials along the state's 370-mile border.

I hope this report is a lesson to the activists and public officials that would prefer to engage in partisan character attacks rather than focus the discussion on the vital need to secure our southern border.

- Senator John McCain

Nearly 2,500 wildfires occurred in the Arizona border region from 2006 to 2010, but the GAO studied only those that were human-caused, burned more than an acre and those for which investigative reports were available. Of the 422 wildfires that topped one acre, federal fire investigators probed 77, or 18 percent.

The GAO report doesn't cover wildfires in 2011 because investigative reports were not yet complete when the GAO was conducting its study.

The GAO found that 30 of the probed wildfires were linked to illegal border crossers primarily in southeastern Arizona based on what was written in investigative reports. Fifteen were thought to be a signal fires or those made to provide warmth and cook food. An investigative report on the 2009 Bear fire backed up that suspicion by noting the discovery of discarded bottles and food wrappers with Spanish language labels near a campfire. It also noted that the area is frequented by illegal border crossers and is adjacent to a heavily used smuggling trail, the GAO report said.

Reports on the other 15 wildfires don't give a reason for the start of the fire, but the GAO said a couple of them mention that the areas of ignition are known for drug smuggling.

The GAO also looked at fire incident reports for 1,123 wildfires in the area over a five-year period and found that 57 of them include firefighters' suspicions that illegal border crossers were to blame for ignition. Those reports are not formal investigations into the fire's origin.

The GAO said federal officials should come up with a strategy about which fires to investigate and use that to guide fire prevention activities and resources. Without a plan that includes selecting and prioritizing wildfire investigations, the frequency in which the blazes are caused by illegal border crossers remains unknown, the report said.

Federal officials cited a lack of available trained investigators to look into human-caused wildfires, according to the GAO report. Both the Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management said providing security for firefighters or their equipment often ranks higher on the priority list.

U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell agreed with the report's observations and recommendations. He said an interagency group is working on standardized policy for wildfire investigations.

Arizona recorded its largest wildfire in state history this year with the 835-square-mile Wallow Fire that destroyed 32 homes, four rental cabins and forced nearly 10,000 people to evacuate. Two cousins have been charged with starting the blaze.

The smaller Horseshoe Two fire atop the Chiricahua mountains burned 348 square miles and destroyed nine homes. That fire investigation report indicates that drug smugglers continued to use the area while the blaze was under suppression, according to the GAO. Another wildfire burning at the time, the 47-square-mile Monument fire destroyed 57 homes.

The GAO also looked at how fire suppression has been impacted by the presence of illegal border crossers. The Forest Service issued a report in 2006 saying the border

region could be dangerous for firefighters because of potential encounters with drug smugglers, high-speed pursuits, biological hazards, and illegal border crossers seeking food, water or rescue. The GAO said federal officials it interviewed did not identify any specific threats or assaults.

But the federal officials said firefighting efforts sometimes are hampered over concerns about border crossers in the area.



Fronts in Canada set up to ship banned goods abroad: secret cable

Colin Freeze

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

Published Tuesday, Nov. 22, 2011 8:51PM EST

Hundreds of Iranian, Chinese and other foreign citizens have set up front companies in Canada to export banned equipment to their homelands, a Canadian official once told a U.S. envoy.

The remarks, described in a leaked State Department cable from 2008, indicate that tough sanctions against rival and rogue states – including new export controls against Iran announced this week – may prove difficult for Canada's national-security agencies to enforce.

The secret cable was written by a U.S. embassy official and obtained by WikiLeaks. It shows that Frank Ruggiero, a senior State Department official specializing in political and military affairs, came to Ottawa three years ago to press security agencies to jail foreigners in Canada who were suspected of illegally sending sensitive technology back home.

He heard from several Canadian officials – including Bob Paulson, now RCMP Commissioner – that the problem was under control. But when pressed, they said such cases were often difficult, and at times impossible, to push through courts. Because of this, authorities said, they often preferred to levy fines or to mine such suspects for their “intelligence value.”

The cable says that an export-controls chief with the Canada Border Services Agency painted an especially bleak picture.

“George Webb struck a discordant note, telling ... Ruggiero that his (Webb's) hands were full targeting hundreds of mostly Iranian and Chinese foreigners and ‘lots of Canadian dual-nationals’ involved in ‘non-legitimate businesses.’ They create front companies for the purpose of procuring defense technologies,” the cable reads. Mr. Webb is said to have complained that “when CBSA agents arrest perpetrators, judges let them out on bail and they simply disappear” and that “Canadian Judges do not appreciate the seriousness of these crimes.”

Officials of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the RCMP gave broad reassurances they were working together to ensure “that Canada does not become a staging ground for threats to the U.S. and other allies.”

Yet there were acknowledged difficulties. While intelligence officials said they routinely pass files to the RCMP for criminal investigation, the Mounties say the material is often not strong enough to support criminal prosecutions.

“The RCMP, like its U.S. law enforcement counterparts, faces challenges when it uses intelligence products to make criminal cases,” explained Commissioner Paulson, who was then a chief superintendant in charge of national-security programs.

According to the cable, when he was pressed whether the RCMP had ever prosecuted an export violation case, “Commissioner Paulson said he was unaware of any, and explained that the ‘greater good’ was often achieved by other means.”

One year after the meeting, an Iranian-Canadian named Mahmoud Yadegari was convicted of acquiring 10 transducers for reshipment to Iran. The transducers, typically used for heating and cooling in medical machinery, could also be used for uranium-enriching centrifuges.

During testimony about Iranian issues before a parliamentary committee last month, officials with the RCMP, the CSIS and CBSA again pointed to equipment seizures – and not criminal convictions – as the Canadian benchmark for success in stopping illegal exports of sensitive technology. “Prosecution and successful conviction is a good deterrent, but it is not the only possible success,” one official said.

Woman accused of breaking visa rules for foreigners at Calif. flight school

By Associated Press, Published: November 30, 2011

LOS ANGELES — Immigration officials on Wednesday arrested a woman accused of bringing foreign students to train at her Southern California flight school on fraudulent visas and without government authorization.

Karena Chuang, 28, was arrested Wednesday at a friend’s house in Rancho Cucamonga and is charged with visa fraud for allegedly enrolling students from Egypt, Sri Lanka and Taiwan at her La Verne-based flight school, Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials said.

Chuang’s Blue Diamond Aviation school wasn’t authorized to receive foreign students under federal government screening procedures that aim to prevent a repeat of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, officials said.

“She is not scrutinizing people nor does she have the ability to know whether or not they have terrorist ties, which is why the whole procedure exists,” Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of ICE Homeland Security Investigations in Los Angeles, told The Associated Press.

“These people are actually going up in the air to get their training — they’re getting access to aircraft, too, and we don’t know who they are,” he said.

Chuang was ordered released Wednesday afternoon on a \$40,000 bond with electronic monitoring, said Thom Mrozek, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney’s office. A preliminary hearing has been set for Dec. 21.

A number listed for Chuang's Lake Elsinore home rang through to a fax line. Jennifer Uyeda, an attorney with the federal public defender's office, said she just received the case and did not have details of the allegations.

It isn't the first time flight schools have let foreigners train without proper authorization. Last year, a flight school in El Cajon, Calif., pleaded guilty to creating fake visa documents for foreign students and a Massachusetts flight school was found to have trained illegal immigrants from Brazil.

Foreign students can apply to attend flight schools in the United States that are authorized to enroll them. The schools will issue paperwork for admitted students to then apply for a visa to travel here.

Students also must be screened by the Transportation Security Administration, which runs a fingerprint-based criminal background check with the FBI's help and runs students' names against terrorist watch lists.

Immigration officials say Chuang posed as the students' cousin to help them get the paperwork required to apply for visas from government authorized flight schools and then had them attend her cheaper school instead.

Chuang coached students not to tell U.S. officials during interviews that they planned to attend her flight school, Arnold said.

Arnold said none of the more than dozen foreign students who trained at Chuang's school since 2006 had ties to terrorism.

John Mueller, a political science professor at Ohio State University, said he believed training foreigners at unauthorized schools to fly small planes posed a minimal security threat and that maneuvering a larger commercial aircraft would take a tremendous amount of skill that aspiring terrorists don't likely have.

He said other measures can be taken to protect against a potential hijacking, such as hardened cockpit doors.

"If there's laws being broken, there's laws being broken," said Mueller, who recently co-authored a book on the cost effectiveness of homeland security spending. "If there's the idea these people are suddenly going to become terrorists and cause bad damage with little tiny planes, it is a questionable assumption."

Four of the 9/11 hijackers received flight training in the United States before the attacks — and three of them had simulated flights in large jets. The training offered at Blue Diamond involved smaller aircraft but a majority of Egyptian students who enrolled there planned to continue onto another flight school to learn how to fly larger planes, said Virginia Kice, an ICE spokeswoman.

Chuang lured students to her school by charging less money for a commercial pilot's license and wrapping up training in six months instead of a year, Kice said. Authorities say they learned of the scheme last year when two Egyptians who received visas to attend a flight school in Northern California admitted they planned to enroll at Blue Diamond.

Blue Diamond is now closed but Chuang has been operating a different flight school in La Verne, investigators said in papers filed with the court.

If convicted, Chuang could face a maximum sentence of up to 10 years in prison, according to federal prosecutors.

Canada-U.S. border deal aims to strengthen North American perimeter while unblocking trade

BY MARK KENNEDY AND SHELDON ALBERTS, POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 8, 2011

WASHINGTON — Canada and the United States unveiled plans Wednesday for an unprecedented joint approach to border protection aimed at developing common practices to screen travellers and cargo, with both governments promising the measures will better guard against terrorism and speed up cross-border traffic.

The much-touted border-security deal, unveiled Wednesday at the White House by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barack Obama, comes 10 months after both leaders launched negotiations to strike an accord.

The result of those talks is a two-part "action plan" that maps out efforts to harmonize regulations across a spectrum of trade goods while increasing the amount of information shared between the two countries about both legitimate and suspect travellers.

"These agreements create a new, modern order for a new century," Harper said at a joint news conference with Obama. "Together, they represent the most significant steps forward in Canada-U.S. co-operation since the North American Free Trade Agreement."

The reforms — many of them involving pilot projects that might not see full implementation for years — aim to integrate programs for Canada-U.S. perimeter security and to streamline the flow of goods between the two countries through pre-inspection and pre-clearance.

"Put simply, we're going to make it easier to conduct the trade and travel that creates jobs and we're going to make it harder for those who would do us harm and threaten our security," said Obama.

The success of the new strategy will hinge on the results of the pilot projects that are rolled out over the next two years, and the action plan also concedes that progress on many initiatives will depend on "the availability of funding."

Among the highlights of the new "Beyond the Border" plan:

- Enhanced tracking of travellers in both countries, and both nations will try to identify threatening people who seek to "enter the perimeter" of both countries so they can be stopped;
- An entry-exit system will be established in which both countries share information on when their citizens have crossed the border;
- Each country will obtain more information, including biometric data, from people in foreign nations seeking to come to the U.S. and to Canada;
- Each country will share more information about criminals in their countries who might be seeking to cross the border;
- Security officials, including armed police officers, will work as teams on either side of the border — with Canadian and American police officers venturing together into the territory of each nation;
- There will be joint screening of cargo coming from foreign countries to Canada and to the U.S., so that it is screened just once for both nations;
- Some companies in either Canada or the U.S. that ship goods across the border will be given "trusted" status so that the shipment is pre-screened at the factory instead of at the border;
- There will be more opportunities for Canadian travellers to obtain NEXUS cards to gain faster clearance at border crossings, and governments will commit more funds to open more lanes for quick clearance at air and land crossings.

The entire exercise, say Canadian officials, is meant to open the clogged border — a problem they say costs the Canadian economy \$16 billion annually because of delays.

"I want to make a pitch: We want even more Canadians visiting the United States — and please spend more money here," Obama said.

The border security actions came in tandem with a separate action plan to create harmonized approaches to regulatory approval of products.

The two countries have identified 29 initiatives where Canada and the U.S. will "align" their regulatory approaches in four areas: agriculture and food; transportation; health and personal care products and chemical management; and the environment.

They said this will lead to lower costs for consumers and reduced barriers to trade, but won't compromise either country's health, safety or environmental protection standards.

As he stood next to Obama at the White House ceremony Wednesday, Harper declared the action plans to be a smart teaming of partners.

"Canada has no friends among America's enemies," said Harper. "What threatens the security and well-being of the U.S. threatens the security and well-being of Canada.

"Nevertheless, measures to deal with criminal and terrorist threats can thicken the border, hindering our efforts to create jobs and growth."

Harper said Canada and the U.S. are now taking "practical steps" to "reverse that direction."

Just as "threats" should be stopped at the joint Canada-U.S. perimeter, "trusted travellers" should cross the 49th parallel more quickly, Harper said.

"These priorities are complementary. The key that locks the door against terrorists also opens a wider gate to cross-border trade and travel."

Harper said the joint initiative on regulatory harmonization will be done to streamline standards "where it makes sense" but that "no loss of sovereignty is contemplated by either of our governments."

"Where no adequate reason exists for a rule or standard, and that standard hinders us from doing business on both sides of the border, that rule needs to be re-examined."

Obama also praised the action plan, saying it will help push forward his top priority — to create jobs.

"The prime minister and I are determined not only to sustain this trade but to grow it faster," said the president.

In a bid to prevent "inadmissible persons" before they breach the Canada-U.S. perimeter, the Harper government will screen visa-exempt foreign nationals for criminal behaviour through an Electronic Travel Authorization program.

It will use an Interactive Advance Passenger Information system to screen passengers on international flights to Canada, giving the government authority to tell airlines whether the person can board the plane.

Canada also will share information with the U.S. about foreign nationals who have been denied admission or a visa to enter the country.

White House officials applauded the Harper government for undertaking the new screening measures. One senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the measures will "allow us to be able to have understanding and confidence" that Canada can identify people who present potential threats.

Obama and Harper also touted plans to establish a comprehensive, co-ordinated system to track travellers as they enter and exit Canada and the U.S.

Beginning in 2012, Canada and the U.S. will begin to "systematically record and exchange the entry information of all persons" crossing at the land border between the two countries. Entrance into one country will serve as "record of exit from the other country," the action plan says.

Canada has committed to collecting exit information from airlines about travellers who leave Canada by plane, starting in June 2014. That information, however, "will not automatically be shared with the U.S., but will be used to enforce Canadian law," the plan says.

Canadian business leaders were quick to applaud the new accord, saying it will open the border for businesses, boost the economy and reduce the waiting time for cross-border travellers.

"Some days, governments get it right," said Perrin Beatty, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. "And this is one of those days."

John Manley, president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, said there have been "challenges" at the border over the last decade, and that Harper deserves credit for striking a deal that will provide "impetus" to solve the problem.

Manley said the challenge for Canada now will be to keep the pressure on the U.S. — where the border is less of a priority — to follow through with initiatives in the accord.

On Parliament Hill, opposition parties were critical.

NDP foreign affairs critic Helene Laverdiere said Canada made too many concessions and that national sovereignty is in peril.

"The major concession is we're sharing even more information with U.S. authorities, but what are we getting?"

Interim Liberal leader Bob Rae said he didn't view the accord as a major step forward, noting it is based on pilot projects.

"We really can't see the major breakthroughs that the prime minister is going to claim he won at the bargaining table," said Rae.

The NDP's trade critic, Brian Masse, was equally unimpressed. He said there are "more questions today" than answers on privacy issues.

"A lot of Canadians will be wondering if I'm going to take my son or my daughter or my family to Disney World, what type of biomedical information am I going to have to disclose or give up to the United States and how is that going to be used, where it's going to be processed and what the fate of it will be after a number of years?"

Council of Canadians chairwoman Maude Barlow said Canada gave up too much for what would essentially be negligible gains given that U.S. politics are responsible for the problems facing the border.

"Once again, we're bending over backwards to try to get something from the U.S. that we're not going to get," she said.

Ever since the perimeter security talks were announced earlier this year, they have been shrouded in secrecy and critics have complained of potential intrusions into the privacy rights of individual Canadians, as well of a loss of national sovereignty.

Privacy Commissioner Jennifer Stoddart released a statement saying she and her officials will conduct a complete review of the deal.

She said the action plan will take years to implement and noted with "encouragement" that both countries have committed to develop a joint statement of privacy principles by next May.

"Overall, we must note that the mere fact that the initiatives proposed will result in unprecedented information sharing requires vigilance from a privacy standpoint," said Stoddart.

Both governments, in their action plan, pledge to protect privacy and maintain national sovereignty.

"Our countries have a long history of sharing information responsibly and respecting our separate constitutional and legal frameworks that protect privacy," concludes the action plan.

The electronic version of both the Border Action Plan and the Regulatory Cooperation Council are available at:
www.borderactionplan-plandactionfrontalier.gc.ca

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement on Beyond the Border

POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 7, 2011

Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Wednesday made the following statement as details of the Beyond the Border perimeter security and trade deal between Canada and the United States were unveiled in Washington.

"Today, we are pleased to announce ambitious agreements on perimeter security and economic competitiveness, as well as on regulatory co-operation.

"These agreements create a new, modern border for a new century.

"Together, they represent the most significant steps forward in Canada-U.S. co-operation, since the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"The first agreement merges U.S. and Canadian security concerns with our interest in keeping our border as open as possible to legitimate commerce and travel.

"As I said in February . . . Canada has no friends among America's enemies.

"What threatens the security and well-being of the U.S., threatens the security and well-being of Canada.

"Nevertheless, measures to deal with criminal and terrorist threats can thicken the border, hindering our efforts to create jobs and growth.

" Today, our two governments are taking practical steps to reverse that direction.

"We are agreed, for example, that the best place to deal with trouble is at the continental perimeter . . . That smarter systems can slash the needless inconvenience posed to manufacturers and travellers by multiple inspections of freight and baggage.

"We also believe that, Just as threats should be stopped at the perimeter, trusted travellers should cross the border more quickly.

"Indeed, these priorities are complementary: The key that locks the door against terrorists also opens a wider gate to cross-border trade and travel.

"The second joint initiative will reduce regulatory barriers to trade, by streamlining and aligning standards where it makes sense to do so.

"Naturally, in this area, as in all others, no loss of sovereignty is contemplated by either of our governments.

"However, every rule needs a reason.

"Where no adequate reason exists for a rule or standard, and that standard hinders us from doing business on both sides of the border, that rule needs to be re-examined.

"Ladies and gentlemen, today's agreement will yield lasting dividends to travellers, traders, manufacturers, — in fact everybody — whose legitimate business or pleasure takes them across the border.

"And we take these steps — both of us — to protect jobs, to grow our economies, and to keep our citizens safe.

"I say "we," because we are each other's largest export customers.

"The benefits of co-operation will therefore be enjoyed on both sides of the border.

"So, let me take this opportunity, Barack, to recognize your leadership in this work.

" It reflects the vision — the large vision - you have for continental trade and security, and your commitment to jobs and growth.

" And it is, I believe, the next chapter in a relationship that is a shining example to the world."

Senate probe reveals serious gaps in Canada-U.S. border security

Julian Sher Globe and Mail Update Published Wednesday, Dec. 07, 2011 2:26PM EST

As Ottawa prepares to sign a ground-breaking security perimeter deal with Washington, the last thing the Conservative government wants or needs are any embarrassing revelations about serious breaches along Canada's borders.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper will announce Wednesday his Beyond the Border action plan with the United States that could see much closer co-operation on such issues as customs clearance, watch lists and border surveillance.

The last systematic investigation of the situation by the Senate committee on national security and defence took place in the summer and fall of 2009, when senators visited border facilities from Vancouver to Halifax to talk candidly with law enforcement and border inspectors.

The results of their work were never published. But The Globe and Mail has pieced together and updated many of the findings of the study by speaking to front-line border officials who told the senators of security gaps that to this date have yet to be fixed.

Holes at Halifax port

Halifax welcomes about 100 cruise ships a year with more than 200,000 visitors. But unlike airline passengers, tourists coming off the boats for a brief stopover are not screened individually as they disembark.

The Halifax cruise-ship port does not have the passport reading machines that are standard at airports. At most, authorities run "a very small sample" of the names on the passenger list provided by the cruise companies ahead of time. "I get a stack of paper, stamp it and admit 3,000 people without any interviews or checks," said one official.

Port officials say there have been at least a dozen passengers and crew members who have gone missing in past few years, including a convicted child molester from Texas who was eventually apprehended in Toronto.

"It's a facade that we operate," one inspector told The Globe. "We check 100 per cent of the people who come into Canada at land crossings and airports. Why not ships?"

'Impunity' for organized crime in Montreal

Law enforcement officials told visiting senators back in 2009 that organized crime groups had "infiltrated key positions" at the Pierre Elliot Trudeau airport, walking around with "impunity."

"It's still a huge problem today, absolutely," a senior RCMP commander told The Globe. He said crime bosses continue to smuggle drugs through the airport and the port of Montreal through "intimidation" and "corruption."

"It shouldn't surprise anybody the organized crime exists at the ports – that's where you move stuff in and out of country," said Liberal Senator Tommy Banks, a former member of the national security committee. "The question is: are the people running the ports in some sort of denial? They shouldn't have their heads in the sands."

Unpatrolled roads

There are more than 100 unguarded roads that lead from the United States into Canada, most of them in Quebec.

At the Stanstead border crossing, Canadian border officers say as often as once or twice a week they can spot cars illegally crossing on a road that is just one street away from their station. But they are not permitted to give chase and must contact the RCMP – which has its nearest detachment 50 km away.

“It’s a real joke,” said one senior border officer. “The criminals, they know how it works.”

Open waters

The United States deploys over 1,000 people to patrol the Great Lakes with nine Coast Guard cutters and many more smaller vessels. For the same five lakes, Canada today has three vessels operated jointly by the Canadian Coast Guard and the RCMP with a total of 18 people.

In Quebec’s Eastern Townships, the 43-km long Lake Memphremagog straddles both sides of the border. The U.S. Border Patrol says it maintains “regular marine patrols” on its side but in Canada, there are only a couple of unmanned “telephone reporting centres.” The calls get answered by a border official stationed in Hamilton.

Pressure at Toronto’s Pearson airport

At Canada’s busiest international airport, customs and immigration inspectors told the Senate committee that when the passport lines get backed up, management often discouraged them from making more extensive background computer checks on visitors.

It’s a practice that continues to this day: “They look at the line up and say: ‘Hurry it up, let them through,’” one inspector said.

Border jumpers in B.C.

Along the vast stretches of parks, farmland and mountains between the manned border checkpoints in British Columbia, the Americans keep watch on their side of the line with sensors, cameras and Border Patrol vehicles. But Canada has none of that, so it is often U.S. technology that tips off Canadian authorities about any illegal northbound traffic – be it smugglers or illegal immigrants.

“The Americans phone us to let us know their sensors have been tripped,” one border officer told The Globe.

There is also a problem with regular “port runners” – people in cars who speed through the checkpoints without stopping. Border officers are not allowed to give chase and there are no police regularly on duty at the crossings; all they can do is call the RCMP.

“Very seldom are they caught,” the border officer said.

Several border posts, like Aldergrove, close at night. “On a regular basis, they see tire tracks going around the barrier when they open up in the morning,” one inspector said.

“It’s an open border,” he added.

Unchecked cargo

The Americans deploy more than 100 large gamma ray scanners called Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS) to take a sort of X-ray of the containers coming into their country by land or sea.

Canada has only twelve, operating part-time – when they are functional. “Everything sort of half works,” complained one B.C. port security official.

He said there are only three VACIS machines to cover four major cargo terminals in Vancouver but at any given time one is shut down for repairs – meaning less than five percent of the containers coming into Canada’s busiest port gets scanned. “Our coastline is wide open,” he said.

“The average traveler faces a higher degree of security at the airport than the huge amount of cargo coming into the country,” he said. “It’s frustrating – and dangerous.”

At some land crossings, truckers with illicit cargo choose a time after peak hours when the mobile VACIS is shut down or being deployed elsewhere.

As for train traffic, the Americans scan every single container that crosses in from Canada by train, but none of the rail cars heading north get screened by VACIS at the border.

With cross-border policing set to expand, Mounties fret over who calls shots

julian sher

BUFFALO, N.Y.— Globe and Mail Update

Published Wednesday, Dec. 07, 2011 5:14PM EST

A handful of Canadian police officers are operating as armed federal law enforcement officers in the United States, part of a little-known experiment in cross-border policing that will be widely expanded under the new security plan announced Wednesday.

But while local and provincial police agencies are happy to see their officers operate in the States, the two federal agencies in charge of border integrity – the RCMP and the Canadian Border Security Agency – want to make sure it’s not the Americans who call all the shots in future.

As he heads off to work every morning, Detective Sergeant Mike Adamczyk of the Niagara Regional Police packs two things: his gun and his passport.

He is stationed at a border post here in New York state with one of three American-led BEST teams – short for Border Enforcement Security Task Force – that operate just across the Ontario border in Buffalo and Detroit and in Blaine, Wash., near British Columbia. A fourth outpost is scheduled to open next year in Massena, N.Y., near the Akwesasne reserve that has long been a smuggling haven.

“For criminals the border is a minor obstacle,” said the 20-year police veteran from St. Catharines, Ont., who has nabbed cocaine, meth and prescription pill smugglers on both sides of porous line that separates the countries. “So we need a seamless border for law enforcement where officers can flow through.”

Det. Sgt. Adamczyk is one of seven Canadians at the BEST unit headquartered in a non-descript building just a few steps from the Buffalo border crossing, the arch of the Peace Bridge that spans the Niagara River visible from the small windows.

Officers from Toronto, Peel, Niagara and the OPP as well as two specialists from the CBSA work alongside more than 30 Americans from eight different U.S. federal and regional law enforcement agencies.

But CBSA and RCMP members of the BEST units are restricted to their computers and phones in the office and cannot join other Canadian officers who conduct investigations, surveillance and arrests in the field.

“For us there’s a question of governance around the whole program that needs to be resolved,” said Mike Cabana, the RCMP’s Assistant Commissioner Federal and International Operations. “It’s fine to say let’s all strap on our guns and go have fun. Well, this is delicate here – there are a number of agreements that have to be implemented. Until those are in place we’re not prepared to put our members at risk and we’re not prepared to put the Canadian public at risk.”

The BEST units are run by the American Department of Homeland Security; it has agency-to-agency agreements with local and regional Canadian police forces to “cross-designate” their assigned officers on the team as U.S. federal law enforcement officers under DHS supervision.

But in the coming months of lengthy negotiations with the Americans to hammer out the details of cross-border policing – especially the presence of American officers in Canada – the RCMP and the CBSA will push for country-to-country agreements with a joint command structure.

Their model is the Shiprider program, an arrangement to patrol cross-border waterways where leadership and supervision of armed officers from both countries is shared equally between U.S. and Canadian law enforcement.

“As we roll out, we can assure Canadians that this is not some sort of rogue operation that will drag people across the border,” said RCMP Chief Superintendent Joe Oliver, the director-general in charge of border integrity.

Supt. Oliver said in their talks with the Americans, Canadian law enforcement officials will push for they will push for “key guiding principles” such as the respect for sovereignty, privacy and the different legal frameworks.

But the Americans running the BEST program say that you cannot argue with success.

“We think the model is good,” said one senior Homeland Security official who requested anonymity because of the delicate negotiations. “BEST works – and it’s really hard to put the genie back in the bottle.”

Since its inception in 2008, the Buffalo unit has made close to 300 arrests – more than a third of them Canadians according to BEST officials – and seized weapons, drugs and \$2.5-million in Canadian and American currency.

Canadian officers on the Buffalo BEST team have travelled as far afield as Georgia and California as part of their investigations, which often end up with arrested Canadians surprised to discover that one of the people interrogating them is a Canadian cop.

“Holy s---, what are you doing here?” is the reaction,” said Det. Sgt. Adamczyk. “Like a deer in the headlights. It’s a shock.”

He said that makes it a lot harder for Canadian suspects caught in the States to lie or dissemble about their connections or activities back home – and also allows Canadian cops to trace back the crime trail, making arrests and seizures north of the border.

In the cramped second-floor quarters of the BEST team, it’s hard to tell the Canadians from the Americans except for the occasional personal flourishes in their cubicles – a Tim Horton’s calendar featuring Sydney Crosby or a picture of a cheering U.S. Olympic hockey team.

Even those national distinctions fade away when the specially-authorized Canadians join the Americans in surveillance, making arrests and interrogating suspects.

“They roll with us, they hit the doors when we do,” said Vincent Salvatore, an assistant special agent with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement branch of the Department of Homeland Security and one of two ICE supervisors of the Buffalo BEST team.

“A lot of the guys that I used to work with bug me that I got the Jack Bauer job,” said Detective Shaun Genovy of the Toronto police, referring half-jokingly to the television hero famous for busting bad guys – and the rules.

The BEST members say their teamwork allows investigators to launch almost simultaneous arrests of drug smuggling networks on both sides of the border, when before a takedown in one country might tip off crime partners in another.

In October, the BEST team wrapped up a six-month undercover operation that led to the arrest of an American and an Ontario man on charges of smuggling powerful prescription narcotic pain killers from Canada, much sought after by American drug abusers.

In 2010, Det. Sgt. Adamczyk helped co-ordinate Project Takeout, which saw undercover officers on both sides of the border unravel a cocaine, ecstasy and heroin smuggling ring that used inflatable rafts to ship contraband drugs from as far away as Europe and Colombia across the Niagara waterways.

Twelve of the 16 Canadians arrested have pleaded guilty so far.

“I’ve seen the gutter,” said Det. Sgt. Adamczyk. “When you’ve seen 16 year old girls in Canada selling themselves for a rock of cocaine and you see these guys making millions and millions of dollars, it feels good to take out the major players.”

Feds to revoke thousands of citizenships in historic sweep

BY TOBI COHEN, POSTMEDIA NEWS DECEMBER 9, 2011 7:22 AM

OTTAWA — In what's being dubbed the biggest citizenship fraud sweep in Canadian history, the federal government is set to crack down on 4,700 more people believed to have obtained citizenship or permanent resident status illegally.

The announcement comes six months after the government moved to strip 1,800 people of their Canadian citizenship or permanent resident status for the same reasons. Up until this year, Canada had revoked just 67 citizenships since the Citizenship Act came into force in 1947.

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney is expected to make the announcement that "Canadian citizenship is not for sale" on Friday, Postmedia News has learned.

He will unveil the details in Montreal where Nizar Zakka — an immigration consultant suspected of fraud — was arrested in 2009. Zakka is suspected of providing would-be Lebanese immigrants with false evidence — indicating that they were living in Quebec when they were not — to support their cases for permanent residency.

He's also accused of filing or contributing to the filing of 861 false tax returns for at least 380 clients between 2004 and 2007. The returns allegedly were then used to claim refunds for child care and property taxes as well as the provincial sales-tax credit.

The bulk of the citizenship fraud cases are said to be linked to Zakka as well as Halifax immigration consultant Hassan Al-Awaid, who was charged in March with more than 50 citizenship fraud-related offences.

The cases are also tied to a third consultant from Mississauga, Ont., west of Toronto, who remains under investigation, according to a government source who noted the others were brought to light thanks to the new citizenship fraud tip line.

Unveiled in September, the tip line already has fielded 5,366 calls.

Letters are currently being sent to the 6,500 people from 100 countries indicating that Canada is revoking their citizenship or permanent resident status due to fraud.

This comes following a lengthy investigation by the RCMP and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Alleged fraudsters, the majority of whom are not currently living in Canada, have up to 60 days to appeal the decision in Federal Court before cabinet moves to void their passports and strip them of all rights and privileges.

According to Citizenship and Immigration, to maintain permanent resident status a person must reside in Canada for at least two years within a five-year period. Permanent residents seeking citizenship must show proof that they've lived in Canada for at least three of the last four years before applying.

At the time of Al-Awaid's arrest, Kenney said he was suspected of helping people "create the appearance they were residing in Canada in order to keep their permanent resident status, and ultimately attempt to acquire citizenship."

He said investigators had linked Al-Awaid to 1,100 applicants and their dependents, 76 of whom had obtained Canadian citizenship.

He noted that many people were prevented from "fraudulently obtaining citizenship" as a result of the investigation.

The government has been taking action against citizenship fraud for some time. The Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act, which imposes tough new penalties for immigration consultants convicted of fraud, including fines and/or prison, is now law in Canada.

OTTAWA SCRUTINIZES PASSPORT HOLDERS FROM FORMER LEADERS OF 'ARAB SPRING' COUNTRIES

Toronto Sun- December 9, 2011

Tom Godfrey

TORONTO - Ottawa is cracking down on former government leaders from toppled Middle East regimes who may be trying to flee to Canada by using the diplomatic passports of their countries, classified documents warn.

Canadian border agents nationwide have been alerted to take a closer look and question travellers entering the country with diplomatic passports because they may be trying to claim political asylum or seek refuge.

Canadian police and intelligence officials are concerned that top political leaders and their families from countries rocked or toppled during the Arab Spring that includes Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, Syria and others may try to use the documents to escape to safety here.

An operational bulletin - number PRG-2011-19 - was issued by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) last April 18 to front-line officers and was obtained through an Access of Information request by lawyer Richard Kurland.

"Due to recent developments in the Middle East, the Traveller Primary Unit in the Border Programs Division has reviewed the processing of persons who have self-identified as diplomats," the bulletin said. "The reviews indicated that there is a need to clarify the procedures for the questioning and processing of such persons."

Officers were told that diplomatic passports are acceptable documents for foreign nationals seeking to travel here as temporary residents.

The memo alerted officers that some diplomats may require visas to enter Canada and would likely be travelling "to attend a conference or for tourism."

It said accredited foreign representatives can also bring their families and household when they move.

"A diplomatic passport is a free pass for anyone who want to board a plane for Canada," said Kurland. "Entire former governments can arrive by using diplomatic passports and claim they are here for a meeting."

Kurland said he won't be surprised if toppled Arab ex-leaders, their families or senior staff are caught trying to slip into the country.

"A lot of former government officials from previous regimes are jumping ship," he said. "They have lost control and there are new leaders in place."

Kurland said the days of free and unchallenged travel by diplomats to Canada are gone. "That ship sailed during the Arab Spring," he said. "The government is no longer taking these people (diplomats) at face value."

Toronto immigration lawyer Guidy Mamann said the CBSA is not only targeting war criminals and street thugs, but even diplomats.

"The agency is leaving no stone unturned due to the vulnerability of the situation in the Middle East," Mamann said. "It appears there may have been a spike in the number of people coming here with diplomatic credentials."

The measure also affects diplomats arriving in Canada by private aircraft who can normally register to CBSA officials by phone. They now have to undergo more stringent checks.

More than 45 members of the foreign diplomatic corps have sought refugee status in Canada in the last three years after arriving as representatives of their home countries, government statistics show.

More than 40 refugee claims from foreign diplomats were filed from Sept. 2009 to Sept. 2010.

Border apprehensions are down for a simple reason...Obama is not allowing them

- By [Dave Gibson](#), Immigration Reform Examiner

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) just announced that the number of illegal aliens apprehended in fiscal year 2011 sunk to a 40-year low at 327,000.

While DHS largely attributes the decline to more stringent border security, it appears that the real reason is something much less impressive.

In May, Arizona Sheriff Larry Dever testified before Congress that Border Patrol's new policy of giving a warning to illegal crossers rather than taking them into custody, known as "Turn Back South" was not only being practiced near the border, but far north of it as well.

Sheriff Dever told the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security: "It appears, according to numerous reports from current and former border agents, that this practice has gravitated many miles north of the border. That means that, regardless of proximity to the border, people who are detected but not caught are considered to be 'Turned Back South.'"

A month earlier, Dever told Fox News that over the last two years, U.S. Border Patrol officials have told him they were ordered on multiple occasions to reduce and even stop apprehending illegal aliens crossing the U.S./Mexican border.

Sheriff Dever said that as recently as March 2011, a Border Patrol supervisor informed him that the agency was ordered to keep the number of arrests down during specific reporting periods.

Dever said: “The senior supervisor agent is telling me about how their mission is now to scare people back. He said, ‘I had to go back to my guys and tell them not to catch anybody, that their job is to chase people away. ... They were not to catch anyone, arrest anyone. Their job was to set up posture, to intimidate people, to get them to go back.’”

Furthermore, in October 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report claiming that the Interior Department and the Agriculture Department have prevented about 15 percent of the 26 Border Patrol stations in the American southwest from apprehending illegal aliens and drug smugglers.

Before Border Patrol agents can build roads or set up surveillance posts on at least half of the land along the U.S./Mexican border, they must first apply for permission from the Interior Department and the Forest Service. Before permission is granted (if it is), the land management agencies conduct environmental studies which take several months.

Of course, all the while...both drug and human smugglers operate basically unimpeded.

The report stated: “These delays in gaining access have generally lessened agents’ ability to detect undocumented aliens in some areas, according to the patrol agents-in-charge.”

Border Patrol agents in Arizona had to wait four months for permission to move a mobile surveillance system, which left a 7-mile range of border unwatched. By the time the agencies granted permission, the smugglers had moved on to another area.

Even more outrageous, the Border Patrol once had to wait eight months while an “historic property assessment” was conducted in New Mexico, so that they could simply move an underground sensor.

“During this period, agents could not patrol in vehicles or use surveillance equipment to monitor an area that illegal aliens were known to use,” the report read.

DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano has been continuously telling us that the number of illegal aliens entering this country from Mexico has dropped substantially since Obama has become president, based on declining border apprehensions--now we may know why...the agents are simply not being allowed to do their job.

'Los Zetas' Gain Growing Control on Mexico-Guatemala Border

Monday, December 5, 2011
Southern Pulse

As the Zetas expand in northern and central Mexico, their control over the entire extension of the Mexico-Guatemala border remains a point of strength for the group. The corridor, particularly the Chiapas-Peten border, helps drive their

profits for human and drug trafficking, and provides them a potential safe haven from the Mexican authorities when they increase pressure.

A key question entering 2012 will be whether the Zetas consolidate their control over this corridor or begin to lose ground in the face of coordinated government actions. Just this month, the Zetas took two blows at different points along that border, but remain powerful.

First, Mexican authorities arrested Santos Ramírez Morales (alias 'El Sapo' or 'El Santo Sapo') the leader of Zetas operations in Tabasco and Chiapas. The arrest of El Sapo and 25 other alleged collaborators in Ocozocuatla, Chiapas was based on intelligence work by the Mexican authorities tracking the movements of drugs across the Guatemala-Mexico border. Information divulged during the arrest also revealed details about Zetas operations in the region including a network of construction businesses based in Mexico such as Constructora Limpez, SA de CV, that were used to traffic drugs and launder money. Several vehicles identified with that firm were seized by police following the Zetas arrests.

Second, Guatemalan authorities broke up several Zetas cells in the northern part of the country. Police arrested two people accused of providing the Zetas with vehicles, weapons and safe houses in the Zacapa province who helped the Zetas move through northern Guatemala. More troubling, Guatemalan police rescued a thirteen year old Mexican boy who had been kidnapped in Chiapas and trafficked to a Zetas safe house in Huehuetenango on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. The "reverse movement" of kidnap victims from Mexico to Guatemalan safe houses should be troubling to officials in both countries, though this incident remains an outlier anecdote so far.

Meanwhile, Mexican and Guatemala authorities search for more cooperation with the election of Guatemalan President-elect Otto Perez Molina. Perez has praised President Felipe Calderon's offensive against the criminal groups in Mexico, and promised to bring his own style of offensive to his country, along the lines of how former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe took the fight to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Specifically, Perez has promised to increase the use the Kabiles and paratrooper special forces brigades to take on the Zetas. To make the point, he named a colonel from the Kabiles, Ulises Anzueto, as his minister of defense. Anzueto's first public promise was to dedicate two brigades each of military police and special forces to the task of confronting organized crime.

Of course, Alvaro Colom was no dove on the matter. Guatemala's current president has used the military, declared states of siege, worked with his regional counterparts, and gone as far as making a call for a regional NATO force. However, the general sense is that the organized crime problem, including its infiltration into government institutions and society, has worsened even as statistics about homicide have improved.

Perez's promise to increase military use, particularly the infamous Kables who many link with human rights abuses and with desertions to criminal organizations, is exactly what Perez opponents feared and supporters hoped. There are fears among NGOs in the country that Perez will increase the military power and influence across sectors that were previously civilian. However, a large portion of Guatemalan society is young, a majority born after the civil war was over, and they will reward progress on security however it is achieved.

One concern with Perez's policies is that the military focus may miss some of the other border problems. Poverty, poor infrastructure and land disputes all contribute to the poor security situation on the border. Land use, including ranches that may be linked to illicit traffickers, has also degraded the fragile environment in the remote regions of Peten. As InSight Crime [reported](#) earlier this year, the Zetas have established themselves deeply within businesses and society on the Guatemalan side of the border. Perez needs to recognize that they cannot just be confronted militarily, and other aspects of national power will be needed as well.

Canada-U.S. deal could close small border crossings

Other border crossings could become unmanned 'remote' ports of entry

By Evan Dyer, [CBC News](#)

Posted: Dec 15, 2011 5:14 AM ET

Canada and the U.S. have been negotiating to do away with some small border crossings and merge others as part of the far-reaching perimeter security deal recently announced between the two countries.

A leaked internal presentation of the bi-national Small Port Working Group reveals details of the negotiations over the fate of so-called "small ports of entry," rural or small-town crossings stretching from St. Stephen, N.B., to Chopaka, B.C.

[REPORT | Small Port Working Group \(pdf\)](#)

The document discusses four options being considered by officials with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for each of the 52 land crossings. The options are sharing facilities, mirroring working hours, using a "remote-technology solution," or closing the posts altogether.

At some smaller posts, the two countries will seek to cut costs by sharing facilities. This arrangement has already existed for many years at some posts and is generally considered

to have worked well. For example, Canada currently pays for a shared facility in Noyan, Que., while the U.S. picks up the tab for a joint border post at Carson, B.C.

The Harper government has already announced its intention to add new lanes to ease jams at some of the busiest border crossings.

But although the deal will make crossing the border more convenient for some, that won't necessarily be true for people in places like Bloomfield, N.B., or Piney, Man. The presentation reveals that CBSA and CBP are looking into closing a total of eight border posts. Manitoba could potentially lose three, B.C. two, and Alberta, Quebec, and New Brunswick one each.

For some border-dwellers, the changes could bring inconvenience. The small farming community of Morses Line is on both sides of the Quebec-Vermont border and normally sees about 80 vehicle crossings a day, but can see as many as 200 on a summer weekend. It already saw the hours of operation reduced at the border post on the Canadian side this past spring, which now closes at 4 p.m. The U.S Customs and Border Patrol is currently seeking public comment on closing the post entirely.

SMALL BORDER CROSSINGS

Sharing facilities: At some border crossings, such as Noonan, N.D., and Estevan, Sask., U.S. and Canadian border guards will combine their operations into one shared border post, where both will work under one roof. Shared facilities have been in use for almost two decades.

Mirroring hours: At places like the crossing between Pittsburg, N.H., and Chartierville, Que., American and Canadian border guards will adjust their shifts to match each other, eliminating the differences that now exist. In most places, hours would be reduced rather than increased.

Remote solution: According to the presentation, some border posts such as Estcourt, Maine to Pohenegamook, Que., will become unmanned crossings. Travellers will speak to border guards through a camera; the guards themselves could be hundreds of kilometres distant. Some CBSA staff have expressed concerns that there will be no one to physically search vehicles entering Canada at these crossings, making them ideal entry points for contraband. Other than a reference to "technology-only processing solutions," there is no mention of unmanned border posts in the action plan released on Wednesday.

Closure: Where border posts are closed, roads will typically be blocked and legitimate travellers will have to travel further to find alternative crossings.

Three very [small border posts](#) were already closed on April 1 at Jamieson's Line and Franklin Centre in Quebec, and at Big Beaver in Saskatchewan. Since U.S. customs remains open at those posts, it is still possible to enter the U.S., but not to return to Canada.

Even as Canada announced plans last year to close Franklin Centre, the U.S. was building a state-of-the-art border facility just a few hundred metres away in Churubusco, N.Y., using seven million dollars of federal infrastructure money. Work on that project halted following the Canadian announcement.

But the U.S. Department of Homeland Security soon came under pressure from New York Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer, who stated in a press release that "our businesses and construction workers in the North Country depend on this project to meet their bottom line and provide for their families."

In that case U.S. domestic political considerations trumped cross-border co-ordination, and work on the U.S. border post soon resumed. Canada still has no plans to reopen its side of the border.

A similar situation arose at East Pinnacle, Que., where Canada cut back opening hours in April. Now the small Canadian border post is open from only 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., while the 24-hour U.S. border post is being upgraded with a new multi-million dollar facility.

In many cases, the document shows that CBSA and CBP continue to debate various options for the smaller ports of entry. For example, at the crossing from Amrose, N.D., to Torquay, Sask., the two governments had not yet decided by this summer whether to share facilities, install remote cameras at an unmanned post, or close the post altogether. In Bloomfield, N.B. – Monticello, Maine, on the other hand, closure is the only option being considered.

The leaked document suggests that planning has advanced further than is acknowledged in the official Beyond the Border "action plan" released by the Government of Canada on Dec. 6. There, under the heading "Next Steps," the action plan mentions "establishing a Small and Remote Port Working Group to evaluate a binational approach to operational alignment (for example, mirroring hours), infrastructure investment and improved service."

But the leaked presentation makes clear that the Small Port Working Group has already been meeting since last January.

Another controversial element of the negotiations is a plan to turn several crossings into unstaffed border posts where travellers will speak to border guards through a camera connected to a distant headquarters. That option is being considered for 23 crossings, stretching from Fosterville, N.B., to Nelway, B.C.

CBC News showed Jean-Pierre Fortin, president of the Customs and Immigration Union, the leaked document, and he expressed surprise over how far discussions had proceeded.

"It's way further, obviously, than we thought it was," he said.

Fortin said some ideas, like harmonizing hours and sharing facilities make sense. However, he said some vulnerabilities remain, including the lack of a comprehensive Canadian border patrol.

"I think we need to create a border patrol with the officers of CBSA," he said.

Fortin also said he had some concerns how remote technology would work.

"What about if the person actually is not admissible? And he's right in front of your camera, and you're talking to him via a phone line or something — you need to have somebody on site," Fortin said.

"And also I'm concerned about the cost efficiency of this — how much the technology would cost versus having our officers there that would actually be prepared to intervene immediately."

Despite his concerns, Fortin said that he sees some signs of hope in the broader Canada-U.S. deal announced last week.

"We see hope in that document, with the initiative of the perimeter," he said. "It's just that right now we don't see, actually, you know, at our level, what that's going to imply for our officers."

Border crossing closures report 'entirely false'

Toews insists talks only looking at ways to keep them open

By: Aldo Santin

Posted: 12/17/2011 1:00 AM | **Comments: 0 (including replies)**g

Manitoba's senior federal MP said there is no truth to media reports several border crossings in the province could be closed or have their hours of operation reduced -- even though a document states those discussions between Canadian and American officials have been ongoing for 18 months.

Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, who is responsible for the Canada Border Services Agency, said he's been involved in discussions with senior U.S. officials aimed at protecting smaller border crossings and ensuring they remain open.

"No such discussions are taking place and in fact the allegations... are entirely false," Toews said.

However, documents from the Small Port Working Group within U.S. Customs and Border protection that were leaked to the media, identify 11 small border crossings in Manitoba that are being reviewed, and Piney, Snowflake and Crystal City are being considered for closing.

The other small Manitoba crossings under review are: Lyleton, Goodlands, Cartwright, Windygates, Gretna, Lena, Winkler and Coulter.

Jenny Burke, a press officer with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, confirmed the existence of the Small Ports Working Group as an active body involving the Canada Border Services Agency, saying it has been examining a wide range of issues, including developing a joint plan for small and remote border crossings.

Burke said she did not know if the leaked document reflects the working group's position or how old the leaked document might be.

The document, which appears to be undated images from a PowerPoint presentation titled *Initial Results & Path Forward*, indicates discussions on the small crossings have taken place since the summer of 2010.

The review of small Manitoba border crossings is part of a greater study looking at all small ports along the border between Canada and the United States. The document states the options being considered include: reducing hours of operation, sharing facilities between the two countries and closure.

Toews said no one on his political staff or department is aware of the Small Port Working Group, adding he believes its existence pre-dates the Harper government's discussions with the U.S. on a new security arrangement between the two countries.

"This document is completely at odds with the direction our government is going in," Toews said, adding current discussions about small border crossings have included sharing facilities or services and the use of technology but with the intent of keeping small crossings open.

Toews said the options discussed in the leaked documents are no longer part of the negotiations between the two countries.

China Reform Monitor - December 2011

Four radar systems purchased by the Ecuadoran Air Force for controlling airspace along the border with Colombia stopped working around six months ago.

China's Electronic Technology Group Corporation (CETC) supplied Ecuador two long-range YLC-2V-3D systems and two Gap Filler YLC 18 systems worth \$60 million and they were deployed in 2010.

[According to Ecuador's *El Universo* newspaper](#), from the start the systems displayed several "irregularities." For instance, they were supposed to be air cooled, but were actually water-cooled and were supposed to have an operational ceiling of 12,000 feet, but were limited to 9,990 feet.

Oswaldo Jarrin, former defense minister, said without the radar systems Ecuador's airspace is currently unprotected and called for an investigation into "why radars are being sent that are of no use and why contract conditions are not being met."

Quicker ride across border

CentrePort pursues high-tech tracking system for cargo

By: Martin Cash

Posted: 12/21/2011 1:00 AM |

CENTREPORT Canada is looking to set up one of the first technology pilot projects in Canada that will attempt to increase efficiency and enhance security for cross-border cargo shipments.

The idea is to develop a system with the highest standards in security and high-tech cargo tracking to expedite processing and secure handling of goods across the border.

Intelligent transportation systems is a concept that has been around for awhile, but the search for the rights systems and technology recently got a big push with the signing of the Beyond the Border agreement signed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barack Obama.

The federal and provincial governments will kick in \$75,000 and \$65,000 respectively, sharing the costs with CentrePort Canada for a \$240,000 study, already underway, to come up with recommendations for how a cargo pre-clearance system could work.

"Ultimately what I would like to be able to do is position ourselves to have a facility away from the border that would allow for pre-inspection of agricultural products and other components that would ultimately lead to pre-clearance," Diane Gray, CEO of CentrePort, said Tuesday.

"The border does not go away. But if you can move the inspection back from the border, you can fast-track the timing. But you need technology to secure the freight."

CentrePort has hired Civitus Group, a Washington, D.C., consultancy specializing in homeland security, to conduct the study. Among other things, it will look at ways other inland ports around the world have used intelligent transportation systems.

Don Streuber, CEO of Bison Transport, a Winnipeg trucking firm, said his company is all for systems that would allow goods to be shipped across the border without stopping. "We understand random stops will likely continue to occur under the premise of security, but randomness is quite different than 100 per cent stoppages of freight."

CentrePort is already setting up Canada's first single window foreign trade zone.

Steven Fletcher, minister of state for transport, said projects such as this one create more value out of the investments that are being made in CentrePort. "(It) represents the convergence of different modes of transportation," he said. "But it also embodies the convergence of new ideas; government and private industry working together toward common goals."

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, heightened security concerns have thickened the Canada-U.S. border, which sees the movement of \$2 billion of goods daily. The project that CentrePort has commissioned will address both security and efficiencies.

"It still means inspection, it still means the border exists," said Gray. "By using technology you would be able to certify that the product has been inspected and has not been tampered with so it can move across the board in a more efficient way,"

Gray cited the scenario for southern Manitoba livestock producers moving product into the Chicago market across the Emerson/Pembina border crossing.

It may be the busiest border crossing in Western Canada, but meat inspection is only available between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday to Friday. A Monday morning delivery requires a border inspection on Friday.

"That means driver and equipment and product are in Chicago as early as Saturday, sitting and waiting for Monday morning delivery," Gray said. "That's inefficient in how equipment is handled and inefficient for personnel."

Gray would not be pinned down on precisely what system is being looked at or when the study will be completed. She did say an inspection facility located on CentrePort's 20,000-acre footprint near the airport could be part of the plan.

Manitoba Transportation Steve Ashton said these kinds of developments at CentrePort are revolutionary.

"Ten to 20 years from now, CentrePort will be seen as the single most visionary investment of this decade," Ashton said.

Immigration agents to screen Arizona jail inmates

The Homeland Security Department says it will replace Maricopa County officers after revoking Sheriff Joe Arpaio's authority to access agency systems.

Associated Press December 20, 2011

Phoenix — The Homeland Security Department will use 50 immigration agents to screen jail inmates in Arizona's most populous county after revoking the sheriff's authority to access its systems, the agency said Monday in a letter to Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.).

The letter from Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Nelson Peacock, obtained by the Associated Press, says the 50 dedicated agents will "screen, identify, apprehend and remove criminal aliens" found in Maricopa County jails.

The agents will replace county officers who had special training and the authority to perform the task in Sheriff Joe Arpaio's lockups. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano revoked that authority last week after a Justice Department investigation concluded that Arpaio's office engaged in a pattern and practice of civil rights and constitutional violations and discriminated against Latinos.

Arpaio strongly disputed the Justice Department findings and said Monday that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents won't come close to replacing the 91 officers who had been doing the work. He said agents won't be in the jails and won't deport all illegal immigrants.

"They're going to have people answering telephones and deciding what levels they're going to deport," Arpaio said. "This is just to pacify the public that they aren't going to be released. And they are going to be released."

That's not the case, according to an ICE statement sent in response to Arpaio's comment that agents would not actually be in the jails.

"As was done previously, all individuals booked into the Maricopa County jail will be screened to determine if they are removable from the United States," the agency said. Those arrested for criminal offenses who are in the country illegally will be "removed from the United States in line with our priorities."

The government's report released last week found that Arpaio's office committed a wide range of civil rights violations against Latinos, including jail policies that deprive prisoners of basic constitutional rights. It also found that his office failed to investigate sex crimes involving Latino victims.

2. Europe

Serbia and Kosovo reach border management agreement

December 2011 **BBC**

The European Union says Kosovo and Serbia have agreed to jointly manage their border crossings, one of the most contentious issues between them.

The agreement was reached at EU-mediated talks and removes one block to eventual EU membership for Serbia.

Serbia has not recognised Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence.

Clashes in the region recently have left scores injured, including Nato peacekeepers, as the Kosovo government has attempted to control the crossings.

Fifty Nato peacekeepers were injured on Monday trying to remove roadblocks set up by ethnic Serbs opposed to the ethnic Albanian government in Pristina sending border guards to the crossings.

"The parties reached an agreement on the EU-developed concept of integrated management for crossing points," the EU said in a statement late on Friday.

"This means that the parties will gradually set up the joint, integrated, single and secure posts at all their common crossing points."

However, Serbian negotiator Borko Stefanovic said some details remained to be worked out.

"Although we have significantly got our positions close, it remains to put the dot on the i," AFP news agency quoted him as saying.

The border agreement comes a week before EU leaders are due to discuss Belgrade's EU membership bid.

Earlier on Friday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Serbia would not be ready for EU membership until it normalised relations with Kosovo.

Russia Urges Ukraine to Join Customs Union After EU Snub

By Lyubov Pronina - Oct 18, 2011

Russian President [Dmitry Medvedev](#) reiterated calls for Ukraine to join a regional customs union after the European Union postponed a meeting with Ukrainian leader [Viktor Yanukovych](#) to discuss closer ties.

Ukraine shouldn't underestimate the potential of the union of Russia, Belarus and [Kazakhstan](#), particularly during recent global financial instability, Medvedev said today.

"We must do everything so that our cooperation doesn't weaken but gets stronger," he told an economic forum in Donetsk, in eastern Ukraine. "Today's reality is that not only states but also so-called cross-border and regional associations are becoming influential economic players."

Russia has said Ukraine's entry into the union may help its request for cheaper natural-gas prices from its neighbor. While Yanukovych has sought to bolster ties with [Europe](#), last week's jailing of former Prime Minister [Yulia Tymoshenko](#) for abuse of office sparked criticism from EU officials, who deem her conviction politically motivated.

Ukraine is discussing cooperation with the customs union, which meets tomorrow in [St. Petersburg](#), and is monitoring its development, Yanukovych told the same forum.

"The global economic crisis makes many countries seek various ways of protecting themselves by using existing opportunities," he said. "We will always do everything in our national interests."

Brussels Meeting Delayed

EU President [Herman Van Rompuy](#) said in a statement today that a planned Oct. 20 meeting with Yanukovych in Brussels to discuss a free-trade agreement "has been postponed to a later date when the conditions will be more conducive to making progress on the bilateral relations."

Closer ties with the EU "will depend on how progress is achieved in the near future," the Ukrainian leader told a news conference in Donetsk later.

[Russia](#) has also been irked by the imprisonment of Tymoshenko, now in opposition, who was convicted for overstepping her authority as premier in signing a 2009 gas-supply contract with Russian Prime Minister [Vladimir Putin](#). The Foreign Ministry said the verdict had an "anti-Russian flavor."

Cheaper Gas

Ukraine wants to reduce the price it pays Russia for gas to unlock the next tranche of a \$15.6 billion [International Monetary Fund](#) bailout without having to increase household energy prices. It may reach a new agreement with Russia soon, Yanukovich said today.

“I would like to believe that in the very near future we will dot all the i’s,” Yanukovich told a news conference in Donetsk, without elaborating. “We have paid, and will pay, for gas in a stable way.”

Ukraine wants to cut its gas imports to 27 billion cubic meters next year from an estimated 40 billion in 2011, lowering the price to \$230 per cubic meter from next year’s expected average level of \$415. Russia has rejected the demands, arguing that the terms of the 2009 agreement must be honored.

Both parties should fulfill their agreements “until they are terminated by some new accord,” Medvedev told the same news conference today. The two nations’ state energy companies [OAO Gazprom](#) and Natfogaz should find ways for mutually beneficial cooperation, he added.

Medvedev said relations with Ukraine are about more than just the price of natural gas, calling for closer cooperation between industries the two nations inherited from the [Soviet Union](#). Trade between Russia and Ukraine will reach a record \$50 billion this year, according to Yanukovich.

Bilateral ties “shouldn’t just boil down to which price to pay for gas,” Medvedev said. “There are other values.”

In Eye for Eye, U.S. Citizens Banned

24 October 2011

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

An unpleasant surprise might await the next White House or Pentagon official who decides to go sightseeing in Moscow or take a dip at Sochi’s beaches: no visa.

The Foreign Ministry [announced](#) on Saturday that it has banned entry for unspecified senior U.S. officials, “mirroring” a ban imposed by the U.S. State Department on Russian officials linked to the death of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

The ministry hinted that the blacklist tit-for-tat could endanger a U.S.-Russian reset in relations. But an independent analyst said Russia’s ban was largely ceremonial because Moscow, if it were serious, would have targeted U.S. businesspeople in Russia.

The Russian blacklist includes officials implicated in “the legalization of torture in American special prisons, the abduction and torture of terrorism suspects, the indefinite detention of Guantanamo prisoners, and the

uninvestigated murders of civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan," ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said.

He also criticized the U.S. blacklist as direct pressure on the Russian authorities and "a political provocation," the ministry's web site said.

Lukashevich did not name any blacklisted officials, but said some of them were involved in the torture and abuse of Russian nationals. This was an apparent reference to the cases of Viktor Bout, a businessman being tried in a New York court on arms trafficking allegations, and Konstantin Yaroshenko, a pilot convicted of drug smuggling. Both were extradited to the United States from third countries against Russia's wishes.

The United States barred dozens of unidentified Russian officials over the summer in connection with the death of Magnitsky, who was detained in 2008 by law enforcement officials whom he had accused of defrauding the Russian government of millions of dollars. He spent 11 months behind bars, dying of health problems and, according to an independent, Kremlin-ordered investigation, a beating administered by prison guards hours before his death. Two prison doctors are under investigation for negligence, but no senior officials have been charged over his death.

The State Department imposed the sanctions in what is widely believed to have been an attempt by the White House to prevent a tougher blacklist, complete with a freeze of U.S.-based assets, from being passed by U.S. Congress.

Several other national legislatures in Europe and Canada are considering similar blacklists.

Russia has repeatedly denounced all attempts at visa blacklists as interference in the country's internal affairs. In July, President [Dmitry Medvedev](#) ordered the Foreign Ministry to draft the blacklist that was announced by Lukashevich on Saturday.

The ministry did not explain why the implementation of the Russian list was only announced now, after weeks of threats.

But the move came shortly after the State Department reprimanded Russia for human rights failings. A week earlier, department official Michael Posner spoke to Russian opposition activists outside Khimki and pledged to step up human rights efforts within the "reset."

Foreign Minister [Sergei Lavrov](#) also [denounced](#) the Magnitsky blacklist on Friday, calling it "an attempt to destroy the line pursued by President Barack Obama." He promised that it would not stop the reset.

But ministry official Lukashevich was less decisive, saying continued "political games with blacklists" might destroy the "positive dynamics" in relations.

Lavrov, who gave a joint interview to three national radio channels, also called Magnitsky's death a "national tragedy" that was "unworthy of Russia." He declined to speak about why no one has been punished over it.

The U.S. government did not comment on the Russian blacklist over the weekend. The embassy in Moscow declined to speak on the issue.

Independent political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky called the Russian blacklist "laughable," pointing out that Russian officials might have assets or business interests in the United States or even plans to emigrate, but the reverse was unthinkable.

"It is obvious that those [U.S.] officials have no assets or property in Russia, and this list is just a ceremonial measure," Belkovsky said by telephone Sunday.

"If the task would have been to act seriously, they could have found U.S. citizens with financial interests in Russia to blacklist," he said.

A Washington-based lobbyist for the Russian government said the Foreign Ministry's blacklist was "more logical" than the State Department's.

"The Russian list is more objective because it contains people who have done harm to Russian citizens. People on the Magnitsky list, meanwhile, haven't violated the interests of U.S. citizens," said the lobbyist, who asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki rights group, said neither list would have been drafted if Magnitsky's death had been properly investigated.

She also downplayed the significance of the blacklist tit-for-tat. "These are just diplomatic counterstrikes," she said, Interfax reported. "I don't think things will change for better or for worse."

November 3, 2011

Russia Declares Deal to Join Trade Group

By [ELLEN BARRY](#)

MOSCOW — A Russian negotiator announced late on Wednesday that [Russia](#) had reached an agreement with [Georgia](#) that would clear the path for Russia to join the [World Trade Organization](#) after 18 years of delay, ambivalence and frustration.

Maksim Y. Medvedkov, Russia's envoy to the talks in Geneva, said Moscow had agreed to a Swiss-mediated proposal that would allow for the monitoring of trade flow between Russia and Georgia, the Itar-Tass news agency reported. Mr. Medvedkov said the monitoring plan "does not depart from the framework of Russia's principled position."

"We are pleased that Georgia supports the project, and that an agreement has finally been reached," he said.

Envoys from the two countries will meet on Thursday in Geneva to confirm that they are in agreement, and a formal document could be signed next week, said Georgia's deputy foreign minister, Sergi Kapanadze. "We have been waiting for the Russian response," said Mr. Kapanadze, preparing to board a late-night flight to Switzerland from Tbilisi.

If Georgia and Russia sign an agreement, Russia's entry to the trade organization could be approved at the group's ministerial meeting in December.

Russia has come close to accession several times, only to have the process derailed by geopolitical shocks, like its 2008 war with Georgia, or by surprise announcements, like Russia's declaration that it would join only as part of a trade union with Belarus and Kazakhstan.

The project was approached with new energy last year as an element of the reset in relations between the United States and Russia, though its outcome has remained uncertain.

Among the central questions has been whether Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin actually wanted Russia to join. Conservatives in his inner circle have opposed accession, in part because industries may face stiffer competition. Last month, when he was asked about the costs and benefits of membership, Mr. Putin's response was "50-50, but over all there are probably more pluses than minuses."

The announcement on Wednesday suggests that he has been convinced by the arguments of liberal economists that membership will bring long-term benefits. It also suggests that despite his bristling language, Mr. Putin has a lasting desire to integrate Russia into the world's great power alliances, a choice that could affect the country's long-term trajectory.

Because accession to the trade group is a consensus process, Russia had to gain the consent of Georgia, a member, overcoming the hostility that has divided the two countries since they went to war in 2008. Russia has built military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two separatist enclaves that make up a large portion of Georgia's territory, and Moscow has recognized them as sovereign nations.

In exchange for its consent, Georgia sought transparency of trade on its border with Russia, a delicate issue because two sections of that border abut Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian leaders said Georgia's demands were political, and urged Western governments — in particular, the United States — to pressure Georgia into giving its consent.

The trade monitoring proposal put forward by Switzerland would station observers in three places: at the main crossing from Russia into Abkhazia; at the Roki Tunnel, which cuts through the Caucasian Ridge into South Ossetia; and at a mountainous crossing into central Georgia, Mr. Kapanadze said.

Though Georgia initially sought observers representing governments or public entities like the European Union, its negotiators last week said they would accept private contractors hired by public entities. After Georgia signed on to the plan, Russia asked that Switzerland oversee the contractors, Mr. Kapanadze said.

Observers will be stationed on the Russian and Georgian sides of the border, though not inside the enclaves, Mr. Kapanadze said. He said on Thursday morning that he had not spoken with Mr. Medvedkov, but that he assumed that any unresolved issues were minor.

“It has to be the same deal; there is only one paper,” he said. He said it was early to reflect on the progress: “I will understand it when the signature has been sealed. Until then, I cannot speculate.”

The formal announcement of a deal, if it occurs in the coming days, is likely to meet with criticism on many fronts. A popular Russian daily newspaper, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, published an article on Tuesday with the headline, “World Trade of Reputation: Russia Can Join the W.T.O. in December if It Compromises Its Sovereignty.”

In the United States, the House speaker, John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, said last week that the White House should not support Russia’s accession until it respected Georgia’s borders, including withdrawing troops from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

It remains to be seen whether Russia, as a member, will adhere to the group’s commitments.

A senior Obama administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said United States leaders were “encouraged by the progress that Russia has made both in the last two years and in the last few weeks.”

“President Obama has made Russia’s W.T.O. membership a top priority for U.S.-Russia relations in 2011,” the official said. “Completing this negotiation will demonstrate that the U.S. and Russia continue to work together to produce results that benefit the American and Russian people.”

EU orders Britain not to send asylum seekers back to Greece because of the debt-ridden country's appalling facilities

By Graham Smith

The Daily Mail (U.K.), December 21, 2011

Britain and Ireland have been told they cannot send asylum seekers back to Greece because of the country’s inadequate asylum arrangements.

No European Union government can take it for granted that another member state’s asylum procedures complied with fundamental rights, the European Court of Justice ruled today.

This ruling came about even though Europe is supposed to have a common asylum policy in place.

Under the policy - the so-called 'Dublin 11' Regulation - asylum seekers entering the EU must apply for asylum in the first member state in which they arrive. If they move to another member state, the authorities there can return them to the first country.

But judges in Luxembourg have now ruled that the provision does not apply if an asylum applicant's fundamental rights risk being breached.

In the British case before the Luxembourg court, an Afghan national - named as NS - came to the UK after entering Greece, where he was arrested in 2008.

He was released four days later and given 30 days to leave the country.

He did not ask for asylum, and later claimed he was arrested when trying to leave, finally being expelled to Turkey and held in 'appalling' conditions for two months.

He escaped and then travelled to Britain where he applied for asylum.

The British authorities ordered his return to Greece under 'Dublin 11', but NS then launched a legal challenge on the grounds that his fundamental rights would be infringed in Greece.

In the Irish case, five unconnected people - originating from Afghanistan, Iran and Algeria - each entered the EU in Greece and were arrested for illegal entry. They did not seek asylum, but travelled to Ireland, where they did apply for asylum.

They also resisted return to Greece because of inadequate asylum conditions.

The UK Court of Appeal and the Irish High Court asked the EU judges for a ruling on whether they could send the asylum seekers back.

The outcome was anticipated, with several EU countries having suspended returns to Greece following a similar ruling earlier this year in a case involving Belgium trying to return an asylum seeker to Greece.

The EU judges' verdict said: 'An asylum seeker may not be transferred to a member state where he risks being subjected to inhuman treatment.'

The Common European Asylum System, said the judges, was intended to make it possible to 'assume that all the participating states observe fundamental rights and that the member states can have confidence in each other in that regard'.

They acknowledged that the system would not work if the return of an asylum seeker was blocked just because of 'the slightest infringement' of the norms governing asylum in the EU.

However, the ruling declared: 'The member states, including the national courts, may not transfer an asylum seeker to the member state indicated as responsible, where they cannot be unaware that systemic deficiencies in the asylum procedure and in the reception conditions of asylum seekers amount to substantial grounds for believing that the asylum seeker would face a real risk of being subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment.'

Conservative MEP Timothy Kirkhope said it was time to 'get tough' with Greece.

'Of course, it is not right that genuine asylum seekers are returned to a country where they face further persecution' he said.

'However, there is also now a clear incentive for people with other motives to enter the EU via Greece, safe in the knowledge that other countries are powerless to return them.'

Mr Kirkhope, a UK immigration minister in the 1990s, said it was now up to the European Commission to take action against Greece for failing to apply basic standards expected of a European country.

He went on: 'If the UK or France had such inadequate systems and poor asylum conditions as Greece, then I have no doubt the Commission would come down on us like a ton of bricks.'

'This ruling was expected but it is still extremely frustrating. Western European countries are not trying to return people to some African dictatorship, but to another EU member state where respect for their basic human rights should be a given.'

Mr Kirkhope added: 'The EU needs to continue to assist Greece in dealing with the significant pressures it faces, but it should also back up its carrot with a stick to push Greece into ending the current unacceptable state of affairs.'

'This is another case of how well-intentioned human rights law is being interpreted to the detriment of those countries that play by the rules, such as the UK, whilst allowing countries that fail to meet their obligations to see little consequence. It is simply not fair.'

But Green MEP for London Jean Lambert welcomed the result, saying: 'Today's judgement only serves to further highlight the importance of ensuring that fully-functioning, efficient and quality asylum systems are operating in all member states if trust between member states is to become a reality, and the fundamental rights of all individuals in the EU are respected.'

3. Africa and the Middle East

'Syrian army planting mines along Jordanian border'

By JPOST.COM STAFF
11/17/2011 18:13

Assad government trying to prevent civilians in Deraa, city of Ramtha, from escaping deteriorating security situation, 'Al Ghad' reports.

The Syrian army [planted](#) landmines at the border with Jordan in order to "restrict Syrians access to humanitarian asylum in Jordan," a week after reports that Syria was laying explosives on the border with Lebanon as well, Jordanian daily *Al Ghad* reported Wednesday.

Syria was laying mines on its border with the Hashemite [Kingdom](#) in order to prevent Syrian evacuees from the Deraa governate and the city of Ramtha from entering Jordan, according to an informed source speaking on condition of anonymity to *Al Ghad*.

"[Syrians] are fleeing the deteriorating security situation in their country," the source said according to *Al Ghad*.

Tensions between Jordan and Syria have hit a low since [King Abdullah II called on Syrian President Bashar Assad](#) to step down, and Syrian activists loyal to their president stormed the Jordanian mission in Damascus.

Abdullah's comments came after at least [40 Syrians were killed](#) in fighting on Monday between forces loyal to Assad and insurgents in a town near the border with Jordan, local activists said, in the first case of major armed resistance to Assad in the region.

The Syrian army has also laid mines on its border with Lebanon, according to local Lebanese officials and witnesses.

One man, Emad Khaled al-Awsheh, was heading back from Syria into Lebanon when he stepped on an explosive, blowing off part of his leg, according to Reuters. The incident took place at Huwaishat on the Syrian side of the border, neighboring northern Lebanon.

Syria may be trying to control the mass exodus of its citizens while Assad and forces loyal to him continue a crackdown on separatist elements and anti-regime protesters that has claimed the lives of more than 3,500 Syrians, according to Human Rights Watch.

Activists claim that Syria has been randomly placing the dangerous explosives, without regard to the villages nearby.

"To place an indiscriminate weapon near villages and places where children were

previously known to frequent is absolutely unacceptable,” the mayor of the northern Lebanese village of Kneissah told Lebanon's *Daily Star*.

According to local officials speaking to the *Star*, Syria has planted mines along the length of the northern border, through disputed territory, and along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria.

More than 19,000 Syrian refugees have fled to neighboring [Turkey](#) since [violence](#) began eight months ago between forces loyal to President Bashar Assad and anti-regime activists, according to the [New York Times](#). About 7,600 still reside in refugee camps there.

An estimated 6,000 evacuees are also living in Lebanon, according to Dubai-based Al Arabiya.

Airport Security Supervisor in Ghana Indicted in Alleged International Heroin Trafficking Ring

US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia Press Release November 23, 2011

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – An airport security supervisor in Ghana was indicted today by a federal grand jury for allegedly assisting members of an international heroin trafficking ring to smuggle heroin from Ghana into the United States through Dulles International Airport.

Edmund Darkwah, a/k/a “Henry,” 37, a resident of Ghana, was charged today with conspiracy to import heroin and two counts of heroin distribution. If convicted, Darkwah faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a maximum of life in prison for each count.

Neil H. MacBride, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Ava Cooper-Davis, Special Agent in Charge for Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)'s Washington Division, made the announcement.

According to the indictment, Darkwah conspired with Edward Macauley, a/k/a “Cudjoe Opoku,” a resident of Ghana and the alleged leader of a Ghana-based heroin trafficking organization that recruits couriers to smuggle heroin into the United States through Dulles International Airport. The organization pays couriers up to \$15,000 to transport the heroin, either in carry-on luggage or stitched into a wig of artificial hair.

Darkwah is a supervisor with the Ghana Aviation Security Section (AVSEC) and was employed at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana. The indictment alleges that the Macauley organization pays Darkwah \$2,000 to ensure safe passage through the airport for its couriers.

To date, 11 individuals have been charged in this ongoing investigation. Four of those charged and in taken into custody in Ghana – Macauley, Frank Ehiobe, Fred Oppong Brobbey, and Matilda Antwi – were extradited to the United States and made an initial appearance in federal court on Nov. 15, 2011. They and five other alleged co-conspirators are scheduled for trial on Jan. 31, 2012. In a related case, Yvonne Ansah Owusu of Alexandria, Va., pled guilty to transporting a suitcase containing heroin from Ghana to the United States and was sentenced to 51 months in prison on Oct. 24, 2011.

Darkwah is currently in custody of law enforcement in Ghana.

This Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation was conducted by the DEA's Washington and New York Field Divisions and DEA's Special Operations Division,

with assistance from the Ghanaian Narcotics Control Board and Ghana Police Services, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the Arlington Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorneys James P. Gillis and Karen L. Dunn of the National Security and International Crime Unit are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

Criminal indictments are only charges and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.justice.gov/usao/vae>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov> or on <https://pcl.uscourts.gov>.

4. Asia Pacific

Fourth boat brings week's asylum-seeker tally to 339

Mark Dodd- [The Australian](#)- November 24, 2011

SHORE-BASED radar on Christmas Island has detected the fourth asylum-seeker boat this week to be apprehended in Australian waters, the latest arrival carrying 98 passengers and two Indonesian crew.

The latest arrivals bring the total number of asylum-seekers and crew detained this week to 339.

Navy patrol boat HMAS Childers intercepted the vessel yesterday afternoon 27km off Christmas Island, a spokeswoman for Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor said.

Last night, passengers and crew were being processed at the island's immigration detention facility.

In a busy day on the high seas for Border Protection Command, the federal government's chartered oil rig support ship Ocean Protector picked up 40 asylum-seekers and four Indonesian crew from a navy patrol boat after they were intercepted off Ashmore Reef yesterday.

The wooden fishing boat was sighted on Tuesday evening by a Border Protection Command patrol plane and HMAS Albany was ordered to intercept the craft as it closed on Ashmore Reef, 850km west of Darwin.

Yesterday morning the vessel was boarded by the navy and 40 passengers and four crew transferred to the Ocean Protector detention ship, which is now steaming for Christmas Island.

Border Protection Command is on high alert as November is a very dangerous time of the year to sail from Indonesia into the Indian Ocean because of the onset of the monsoon season.

The navy intercepted a large wooden traditional fishing vessel approaching Christmas Island on Tuesday, carrying 116 passengers, after a distress call was received by a Brisbane relative of one of the asylum-seekers on board the ship who was worried about its seaworthiness.

Federal opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison said yesterday only three boats a year arrived when the Howard government's border protection policy was in force. "By contrast, under Labor's failed policies we have had three boats arrive so far this week," Mr Morrison said before the latest arrival.

"People-smugglers are cramming more people on to dangerous boats in the lead-up to the monsoon season and the government has no policy in place to offer even the slightest deterrence.

"The last time this many people arrived in a month was in November last year when 14 boats arrived with 733 people on board.

"The Australian people do not deserve a Prime Minister who has thrown in the towel to people-smugglers, because she cannot admit that Labor was wrong to abolish the Howard government's proven measures."

Boat arrivals exceed 600 a month

Kirsty Needham
November 24, 2011 - 3:00AM

THE fourth people smuggler's boat in three days has carried the 701st passenger this month into Australian waters, fulfilling the Immigration Department's warning to the opposition of the consequences of the collapse of the so-called Malaysia solution.

Two boats, carrying 144 asylum seekers and crew, were intercepted yesterday, quickly passing the controversial "600 a month" threshold that Immigration Department secretary Andrew Metcalfe warned in private briefings would make immigration detention unviable and could lead to European-style social unrest.

Asylum seeker arrivals have more than doubled since October, when Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the effective end of offshore processing because the opposition would not pass legislation to overcome a High Court ban on the Malaysia refugee swap.

Since then, there has been one boat tragedy with eight asylum seekers drowning off Java, and a "near miss" and the death of a skipper in an incident off Christmas Island in rough seas this week. Two presidents of Nauru have been sacked as political instability engulfs the tiny Pacific nation that is the Coalition's preferred offshore processing solution.

Immigration Minister Chris Bowen yesterday challenged the Coalition to match "hollow words" on stopping the boats with action. "If the opposition wants to see offshore processing, we want to see offshore processing; the only difference is we're prepared to vote for it," Mr Bowen said.

But opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison has called for the federal government to instead bring an immediate vote on the opposition's amendment to the bill, which would only allow offshore processing in countries that have signed the Refugee Convention.

Arrival numbers have returned to the peak seen in the final months of 2010 before the deadly December boat crash killing 50 had acted as a brake on dangerous voyages .

Fourteen boats carrying 955 asylum seekers and crew have arrived since October 13, when the federal government said it would use bridging visas to move asylum seekers into the community to avoid detention crowding.

The Immigration Department had forecast just 750 asylum seekers arriving in 2011 in the federal budget, and the mid-year economic forecast, expected to be released next week, must revise spending upwards to account for the dramatically larger numbers.

Mr Morrison said: "People smugglers are cramming more people onto dangerous boats in the lead-up to the monsoon season and the government has no policy in place to offer even the slightest deterrence."

Mr Bowen said the Coalition "has made a political decision that it is not in their political interest to see boat arrivals in Australia stop".

Liberal senator Michaelia Cash was attacked in the Senate for saying that it was "the gift that keeps on giving".

Labor Senator Kim Carr said: "Senator Cash has said this is the 'gift that keeps on giving'. We could not get a clearer policy position from the Liberal Party, which wants people to get on these leaky boats and to drown at sea."

Senator Cash said she had been misrepresented.

There were 959 people in detention on Christmas Island last Friday, not including 344 arrivals this week. There are 3923 asylum seekers in mainland detention.

Afghan asylum seeker to be forcibly deported

Sydney Morning Herald, Kirsty Needham, 2011 11 15
Sydney –

THE federal government will forcibly deport an Afghan asylum seeker to Afghanistan for the first time under the terms of a controversial return agreement with that country's government.

Ismail Mirzajan, 27, has been told he is scheduled to be moved from the Villawood detention centre and flown to Kabul on Saturday.

Mr Mirzajan, a Hazara, fled Afghanistan as a 17-year-old a decade ago and has not been back since. He says his family have fled to Pakistan. The removal notice says Mr Mirzajan will be charged \$32,782 for the deportation, which will be escorted.

The Afghan embassy in Australia is understood to be unhappy with forced deportations of its nationals and a prominent Hazara politician traveled to Australia this year to reinforce the message that returns should be voluntary.

Sydney sheikh stalled

The Age, Dylan Welch, 2011 11 15
Sydney –

A **CONTROVERSIAL** Australian sheikh has been left stranded in Jordan after authorities confiscated his Australian passport, possibly in relation to his membership of an international group that advocates a global Islamic caliphate.

Ismail al-Wahwah, a Hebron-born sheikh who lives in Sydney, had finished the haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and travelled to Jordan to visit family. But upon arrival at Amman airport his passport was confiscated, leaving him stranded.

Sheikh al-Wahwah is a member of Hizb ut- Tahrir, which is banned in Jordan.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, or party of liberation, formed in 1953 in Jerusalem, has spread to more than 40 countries and has hundreds of thousands of members. Its goal is the creation of a global pan- Islamic state.

While it advocates achieving that goal through non-violent means, it has been criticised for the fiery rhetoric of some senior members. Its global leader, Ata Abu- Rishta, in 2006 called for the "destruction" of Jews in Israel, Hindus in Kashmir and and Russians in Chechnya.

In 2007, Sheikh al-Wahwah was forced to fly back to Australia from Jakarta after Indonesian authorities refused him entry. He had been planning to speak at an international Hizb ut-Tahrir conference.

'Senior' boat figure arrested

The Age, Tom Allard, 2011 11 23
Sydney –

Indonesian police have arrested an alleged Iranian people smuggler they suspect helped organize the doomed vessel that sank off West Java earlier this month, killing at least eight people.

The 39-yearold, named by police sources as Reza, alias Jalal, had collected money from a number of the boat's passengers and was described as a senior figure in a large syndicate that has brought hundreds of asylum seekers from Tehran to Jakarta and then on to Australia.

"We believe this is a big catch," said Senior Commissioner Martinus Sitompul, a spokesman for West Java police, adding that Reza was arrested in the city of Bandung last week and lived in Bogor with his family, collecting between \$US3000 and \$US5000 from each asylum seeker trying to reach Australia.

The vessel that Reza's syndicate allegedly organised was dilapidated and crammed. It sank less than an hour into its journey.

Australia to free some asylum seekers from detention

Globe and Mail Update- Nov. 25, 2011

Australia on Friday loosened its highly charged policy of mandatory detention for asylum seekers who arrive by boat, freeing 27 from overcrowded, prison-like conditions and estimating more than 100 would be released monthly.

The move was welcomed by human-rights groups. They have strongly criticized the 20-year-old policy as inhumane, though it remains popular among many Australians who regard the increasing boat arrivals as a major political issue.

About 3,800 people seeking to stay in Australia live in detention centres surrounded by razor wire, either waiting for their asylum claims to be assessed or appealing rejections. Children and their mothers are usually accommodated elsewhere.

The 27 men released Friday are Afghans and Sri Lankans who will live on temporary visas with family and friends in Australia while their refugee claims are assessed.

“This is the initial batch of bridging visas,” Immigration Minister Chris Bowen told reporters. “We estimate that at least 100 bridging visas will be issued each month.”

The number freed and how long the releases will continue will depend on the rate of future arrivals, he said. The department will choose those freed on visas based on the length of their detention, their behaviour and the ability of family and friends to house them.

Asylum seekers – mostly from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and Iraq – have been heading to Australia on rickety boats in greater numbers since August, when the High Court ruled that a government plan to deport hundreds of new arrivals to Malaysia was illegal.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard attempted to salvage the plan but shelved the revised legislation last month when it became clear Parliament would reject it.

The opposition, which opinion polls show is likely to win the next elections in 2013, said the government “has flung the door open to illegal boat arrivals on the eve of the monsoon season, the most dangerous time of year to travel.”

“A government who claims to want to provide a deterrent on boat arrivals would never do this,” opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison said.

Amnesty International and the Australian Human Rights Commission, a government-appointed watchdog, were among the groups welcoming the new policy as a more humane way to treat people seeking protection.

“Australia has been alone among industrialized nations in subjecting asylum seekers who arrive without visas to detention for the entire period taken to determine their refugee status,” said Paul Power, chief executive of the Refugee Council of Australia, a non-government advocacy group.

The mandatory detention regime has been widely criticized by rights groups as punitive and has been blamed for suicides and psychiatric problems among detainees.

Pak prisoners head for US, Canada

By editor

Created 28 Nov 2011 - 00:00

Sixty-four Pakistani nationals, who have been lodged in Tihar Jail for the last four years as they refused to go back to their country, will soon live a free life in Canada and the US.

As they are being provided refugee status in Canada and the US, the jail authorities, with the help of United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) officials, will teach them English and the lifestyle of the two countries.

The UNHCR has granted them a status of refugees and now they will be settled in the US and Canada, sources informed.

Tihar Jail officials said that both the countries have agreed to provide their land to the refugees.

“These Pakistani nationals refused to go back to their country and burnt their passports at Jantar Mantar in April 2007 and they were arrested for this. Since then they have been lodged in Tihar Jail. These 64 inmates, including 18 women and 12 children, pleaded in the Delhi high court in 2010 that they did not intend to go back to Pakistan. They told the court that they will be tortured in their own country,” a senior jail authority said.

The Indian government tried to send them back to Pakistan many times but they repeatedly refused and proffered to stay in an Indian jail.

Sources in the Tihar jail confirmed that these inmates are Muslim, as they offer namaz, but they also believe in their godman, named Gauhar Shahi. They have been alleging that they were tortured for their faith in Gauhar Shahi. These inmates are lodged in jail number four and six.

A UNHCR team has already interviewed these inmates to know why they do not want to go back to their country.

Mekong River four-nation patrols begin after attacks

BBC News- Dec. 10/11

China has begun joint patrols on the Mekong River with three other countries in the region to enhance security, after a series of attacks.

Joint patrols with Burma and Laos started on Saturday morning, China's state media reported.

Personnel from Thailand are expected to join the operation further downstream, possibly on Sunday.

The patrols are a response to the killing of 13 Chinese sailors travelling on the river in October.

The four-nation deployment aims to fill a security vacuum in the Golden Triangle region, an area notorious for drug-trafficking.

China's booming trade along the Mekong was suspended after the attack on 5 October left the bodies of the Chinese crew members floating in the water.

Drug smugglers were initially suspected of the attack, but nine Thai soldiers were subsequently detained.

More than 200 police from the border defence force in Yunnan province will take part, China's public security ministry said on Friday.

It is not yet clear how they will link up with their Burmese, Lao and Thai counterparts, how far along the Mekong the patrols will go, or if officers from one country will be able to perform arrests in others' territorial waters.

China's declared policy of non-interference in other countries' affairs has shifted as its economic horizons expand.

The Chinese navy has played a prominent role in the international operation off Somalia, protecting shipping from pirate attack.

But this is the first such joint deployment in South East Asia, where China's growing assertiveness is being watched closely.

N.K. soldier shoots defector arriving on Chinese soil: witness

SEOUL, Nov. 7/11 (Yonhap) -- A North Korean defector was recently shot dead by the North's border guards on Chinese soil shortly after crossing a border river, a civic activist here claimed Monday, suggesting that the Pyongyang regime has toughened its crackdown on defectors.

"I witnessed on Oct. 22 a North Korean man shot to death by the North's guards, when he stepped onto a Chinese road after crossing the Amnok River near Hyesan in the northern province of Yanggang," Kim Yong-hwa, head of the North Korea Refugees Human Rights Association of Korea told Yonhap News Agency by phone.

N. Korea warns against Christmas lights near border

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE DECEMBER 10, 2011

SEOUL — North Korea warned South Korea on Sunday of "unexpected consequences" if Seoul displays Christmas lights near the tense border, and vowed to retaliate for what it called propaganda attempts.

The South's defence ministry said earlier it was considering a request by a Seoul church group to put up Christmas lights on a steel tower atop a military-controlled hill near the border.

The North's official website— Uriminzokkiri— called the plan "a mean attempt for psychological warfare" against the communist state and threatened to retaliate immediately when the lights are switched on.

The 155-metre hill in the South, about three kilometres from the border, is within range of North Korean gunfire.

"The enemy warmongers . . . should be aware that they should be held responsible entirely for any unexpected consequences that may be caused by their scheme," it said.

"This issue . . . is not something to be ignored quietly," it said.

The two Koreas in 2004 reached a deal to halt official-level cross-border propaganda and the South stopped its annual Christmas illumination ceremony.

But Seoul resumed the ceremony last December amid high military tensions with Pyongyang.

Cross-border ties have been icy since the South accused the North of torpedoing its warship with the loss of 46 lives in March 2010.

Pyongyang angrily denied involvement but went on to shell a border island in November 2010 that left four South Koreans dead and sparked fears of war.

The North had accused the South of displaying Christmas lights to spread Christianity among its people and soldiers. The North's constitution provides for religious freedom, but the U.S. State Department says this does not in practice exist.

11-23-2011 07:58



Yu asks China to send NK defectors to South Korea

BEIJING (Yonhap) -- South Korea's top official in charge of relations with North Korea on Tuesday asked China to quickly send North Korean defectors to South Korea.

Tens of thousands of North Korean defectors are believed to be hiding in China, hoping to travel to Thailand or other Southeast Asian countries before resettling in South Korea.

Unification Minister Yu Woo-ik sought cooperation from Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to ensure that "North Korean defectors can quickly come to South Korea based on their free will."

As Pyongyang's key ally, China does not recognize North Korean defectors and repatriates them back to their homeland, where they could face harsh punishment and even execution, according to defectors and activists.

Still, Beijing has allowed defectors in high-profile cases to leave for South Korea in an apparent move to avoid international criticism.

Yang told Yu that China will handle defectors in accordance with domestic and international laws as well as humanitarian principles.

The comments come as a stream of North Koreans continues to cross the border into China for eventual defections to South Korea, home to more than 22,700 North Korean defectors, according to defectors and activists.

Some North Koreans have crossed the inter-Korean sea border to seek refuge in the South in recent years. Defectors and experts said the North's chronic poverty and political oppression are spurring the defections.

South Korea has a longstanding policy to accept any North Korean defectors who want to live in the South.

Yang also called for diplomatic efforts to resume the long-stalled talks on ending Pyongyang's nuclear weapons programs.

North Korea has repeatedly called for a quick resumption of the talks without any preconditions, but Seoul and Washington insist that Pyongyang halt its uranium enrichment program and allow U.N. inspectors back into the country before resuming the talks.

The talks, which involve the two Koreas, the United States, China, Japan and Russia, were last held in Beijing in late 2008.

Meanwhile, Yu met with State Councilor Dai Bingguo in Beijing and asked China to use its leadership in persuading the North to return to negotiating table and change its "attitude" for the sake of peace not just on the Korean Peninsula but also in the entire Northeast Asian region.

He also called for China's efforts in preventing the North from engaging in further military provocations down the road.

In response, Dai was quoted as saying that members of the six-party talks should make all-out efforts to protect peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. He noted that they should not undermine those efforts, adding that there is no reason for them to do so.

Ship carrying scores of illegal migrants sinks off Indonesia's Java island

By: Ali Kotarumalos, The Associated Press

Posted: 12/17/2011 11:52 AM

JAKARTA, Indonesia –

A wooden ship believed to be carrying more than 200 migrants, many of them from the Middle East, sank Saturday off Indonesia's main island of Java, local media reported. So far only 33 people have been rescued.

Police blamed the accident on overloading, telling the official news agency Antara that the vessel appeared to have been carrying more than twice its capacity. One of the survivors, Esmat Adine, told Antara the ship started rocking from side to side, triggering widespread panic.

Because people were so tightly packed, they had no where to go, said the 24-year-old Afghan migrant.

"That made the boat even more unstable and eventually it sank," he said. Adine said that he and others survived by clinging to parts of the broken vessel until they were picked up by local fishermen.

He estimated that more than 40 children were on the ship. It was not immediately clear if any were rescued.

Indonesia, a sprawling archipelagic nation of 240 million people, has more than 18,000 islands and thousands of miles (kilometres) of unpatrolled coastline, making it a key transit point for smuggling migrants.

Those on board Saturday — apparently heading to Australia — were from Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The private television station Metro TV reported that 33 people had been found alive and that perhaps 215 others were still missing. Last month a ship carrying about 70 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan capsized off the southern coast of Central Java; at least eight people died.

Chinese Province Starts Drone Patrol of Waters Near N.Korea

Chosun Ilbo- Dec. 1/2011

Marine authorities in the northeastern Chinese province of Liaoning near the North Korea-China border are using an unmanned aerial vehicle to watch illegal activities in waters off North Korea. Since not many countries use UAVs for coastal patrols, there is speculation that China wants to monitor North Korean defectors who escape by sea.

Hong Kong's South China Morning Post on Wednesday reported Liaoning marine authorities "began drone patrols for the first time over water and islands close to North Korea last week."

Liaoning is the first province to use a drone for coastal patrols. So far the patrols have only been test runs, but an annual budget of 10 million yuan is available from next year to make them a permanent fixture, the Liaoning provincial government said.

The provincial government set up a UAV deployment and control centre in the coastal city of Dalian. Liaoning said use of the UAV aims to prevent illegal activity at sea and collect information necessary for the protection of the coast. It said it needs the drone because the coast is 2,200 km long and covers 150,000 sq. km of waters and 506 islands.

But the paper said, "Chinese officials are keen to upgrade marine patrols in case of a sudden flow of refugees from North Korea."

Another speculation is that drone patrols are aimed at cracking down on Chinese fishing boats illegally catching fish in South Korean waters. Many of the trawlers are based in coastal cities in Liaoning, including Dandong.

But China says the Liaoning scheme "is run by the civilian government without the use of military-grade equipment," according to the paper. Li Ziwei, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Remote Sensing Applications, was quoted as saying, "The drones used by the People's Liberation Army were among the best in the world, able to climb tens of thousands of meters and stay in the air for almost 24 hours without refueling... the model being used by the Liaoning authorities -- with a camera only able to pick out objects no smaller than 50 cm -- almost certainly came from the civilian sector."

"Military UAVs wouldn't be used for daily tasks such as border patrols -- they're too expensive," she added.

The U.S. uses unmanned helicopters for coastal patrols.