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The Boundaries Question



John W. Holmes is Director-General of the CIA and one of North America's most provocative political thinkers. Below are excerpts from a lecture by him, entitled "In Praise of National Boundaries," which was

first delivered at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. In it Mr. Holmes considers the possibilities of "continentalism" as it might apply in terms of the land mass north of the Rio Grande. It is difficult to excerpt Mr. Holmes and we apologize for the substance lost in the process.

The world is not, and presumably never will be, laid out logically. All states — and not just Canada — are artificial products of the politics and economics of past generations. . . . We are led astray, however, by an unthinking devotion to the idea that the more countries which can be wrapped up in bundles the better. . . . Internationalism too often has been a negative belief that barriers should be torn down, that national boundaries are unnatural and offensive to human dignity. It is particularly hard for people on this continent to realize that the customs and immigration controls which irritate us when they interfere with our swift passage across our famous unguarded frontier are in fact essential guarantees of our respective ways of life, including our jobs. . . . The unreasoning instinct of nice friendly people is to tear the nasty barriers down. That is the path of unity. It is also the path of the homogenization of mankind, the domination of the great powers, the crushing of smaller ones. . . . Smaller countries do not exist only out of perversity. They exist so that government, even in a cybernetic age, can remain closer to the people. . . .

The threat of continentalization comes not from governments but from forces beyond the control of governments. The men in Washington insist that Canadian nationalists are flogging a straw man, that the United States has no intention of annexing Canada or interfering with the Canadians' perverse will to maintain a national existence. . . .

I not only agree that there is no evidence

whatsoever of a U.S. intention to annex Canada, I disagree strongly with the simple-minded assertion that the United States is planning to take over Canada economically. The United States, thank God, has no plans for Canada at all. . . . It isn't annexation by the United States we have to resist now; it is creeping continentalism, the incorporation of Canada by suction into an entity called North America.

If Canada ceases to exist it is more likely to be death by hypnosis than by foreign investment. The vitality of the American media, from NBC to *Penthouse*, is such that Canadians are losing consciousness of themselves. . . . We are in danger of becoming a zombie nation, our physical structure intact but our souls and minds gone abroad. . . . Canada may well be conquered by American television. That's a hell of a way to die. . . .

We have to remind ourselves of this central principle of North American co-existence because we are entering a new era when our relations may be fundamentally changed from those to which we are historically accustomed. Present trends indicate that the balance of advantage may now be shifting to the smaller country even though that country is bound to remain the weaker in aggregate power. . . . Already there has been a dramatic shift in the flow of immigrants, altering a century-old pattern of a preponderant flow of Canadians to the United States. . . . We must consider the possibility that a shift of economic advantage would invite a shift of population which could bring with it some baffling and disturbing dilemmas. . . .

In the past the United States on the whole played the game with Canada. . . . Quiet Americans seemed to prevail in the end over the rabid senators and editors and generals who hollered at the Canadians to get in step or else. In any case, . . . there was no need, it was said by a distinguished American, to push, because when the Canadians were ready Canada would fall like a ripe apple into the arms of the Republic. . . . The British miscalculated, like the Americans, because they regarded Canada as an aberration . . . , which had no future. . . .

There may have been something to be said for continental union at one time, although it would