

# Continental Defense at a Crossroads

## US Strategic Contingency Planning for an Independent Alberta

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### Abstract

Alberta's hypothetical secession from Canada—unlikely but strategically explosive—would reshape the security architecture of North America. Its independence would touch every vital US interest: defense, energy, and the stability of the northern border. With Alberta anchoring key NORAD infrastructure and supplying a disproportionate share of continental oil, separation would raise immediate questions about basing rights, energy flow continuity, border management, and the opening for hostile foreign influence. The analysis argues for quiet, disciplined US contingency planning: ensuring uninterrupted NORAD operations at Cold Lake, protecting energy corridors, and blocking predatory state-backed investment in Alberta's critical infrastructure. The imperative is preparedness without interference—preserving continental defense and economic stability while respecting Canada's internal politics. For US planners, the task is clear: maintain an unbroken aerospace shield, secure supply chains, harden the border, and preempt adversarial leverage. Prudence demands planning now, before strategic surprise arrives on United States' northern frontier.

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The disintegration of Canada is no longer an entirely academic proposition. What was once dismissed as implausible—Alberta's secession from the Canadian federation—now occupies the category that matters most to serious strategists: low probability, high consequence. Such scenarios do not demand alarmism. They demand preparation.

For the United States, Alberta's hypothetical independence would present an immediate strategic problem at the core of continental security. Canada is not merely a neighbor or ally; it is a structural pillar of North American defense, energy stability, and border integrity. Any rupture within the Canadian federation would therefore reverberate directly across US defense planning, particularly in areas where geography, infrastructure, and alliance commitments converge. Alberta sits precisely at that convergence.

Washington's longstanding posture toward Canadian unity has been one of principled restraint. Successive US administrations have affirmed support for a strong, united Canada while scrupulously avoiding involvement in Ottawa's internal constitutional debates. That posture should not change. But restraint in diplomacy does not excuse negligence in planning. From a national security perspective, the United States cannot assume that Canada's internal political configuration is

immutable. Prudence requires anticipating disruption—even among allies—and preparing quietly to manage its consequences.

Alberta's strategic salience to the United States is disproportionate to its population. The province anchors critical components of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) architecture, hosts key Royal Canadian Air Force basing essential to continental air defense, and constitutes the heart of North America's most important foreign energy supply. Alberta's oil and gas production underwrites US energy security at scale, feeding refineries across the Midwest and Gulf Coast through deeply integrated pipeline networks. At the same time, Alberta's long, lightly populated frontier with the United States would—if transformed overnight into a new international border—pose immediate challenges for customs enforcement, law enforcement cooperation, and infrastructure security.

These vulnerabilities would be magnified during any transitional period following secession. Political uncertainty, legal ambiguity, and institutional strain would create openings—openings that history suggests adversarial powers are quick to exploit. From hostile state-backed investment in critical energy infrastructure to disinformation campaigns aimed at fracturing allied cohesion, an emergent Alberta would present both temptation and opportunity to geopolitical competitors. For the United States, the risk would not be Alberta's independence per se, but the strategic vacuum that could accompany it.

This article examines Alberta's hypothetical secession strictly through a US national security lens. It does not assess the merits of separatism, nor does it speculate on its political likelihood beyond recognizing its strategic implications. Instead, it asks a narrower, more urgent question: What would the United States need to do—immediately and discreetly—to protect continental defense, energy stability, and border security if Alberta became an independent state?

The analysis proceeds in four parts. First, it situates Alberta's secessionist impulses within the broader strategic context relevant to US planners. Second, it assesses the implications for continental defense, with particular attention to NORAD continuity and aerospace control. Third, it examines risks to North American energy security and the stability of cross-border supply chains. Fourth, it addresses border security and the threat of hostile foreign influence during a period of political transition. The article concludes with policy-oriented recommendations designed to guide quiet US contingency planning—planning that preserves allied unity, avoids political interference, and ensures that North America's strategic defenses remain intact regardless of constitutional outcomes north of the border.

## **Strategic Context: Alberta Secession and US Interests**

Any credible discussion of Alberta's possible independence must hold two truths simultaneously: its likelihood remains low, but its consequences would be profound. Alberta separatism is not a sudden aberration; it is a recurring feature of Canadian politics, flaring episodically in response to perceived structural inequities within the federation. At its core lies a durable belief that Alberta's political and economic interests diverge sharply from those of Ottawa.<sup>1</sup>

These grievances are largely institutional rather than ideological. Alberta has long resented what it views as asymmetries in Canada's federal system—most notably the equalization framework that redistributes resource-derived revenues to other provinces, and federal environmental policies that constrain the development and export of Alberta's petroleum resources. Over time, these pressures have fostered a distinct political culture, more conservative and libertarian than that of central Canada, reinforcing a sense of regional alienation rather than a coherent separatist nationalism

The result has been cyclical mobilization rather than sustained momentum. Alberta separatist movements have periodically coalesced into organized campaigns, but none has approached the threshold required for a successful independence referendum. Still, political marginality should not be mistaken for strategic irrelevance. Following the 2025 federal election—which again produced a Liberal government with minimal representation from Alberta—separatist rhetoric briefly resurfaced, accompanied by proposals for a provincial sovereignty act and speculation about a referendum question. These initiatives did not reflect a governing consensus, but they underscored the persistence of the underlying fault lines.<sup>2</sup>

Mainstream Alberta leadership has stopped well short of endorsing secession. Instead, it has employed the specter of sovereignty as a bargaining instrument. Premier Danielle Smith's invocation of an Alberta Sovereignty Act passage of Bill 14

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Freire-Gibb, "Alberta sovereignty push: Learning from the economic fallout of similar separatist movements," *The Conversation*, 3 January 2024, <https://theconversation.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Darrell Bricker, "How to Fix Western Alienation," *Maclean's*, 18 November 2025, <https://macleans.ca/>; and Danielle Smith, "Alberta Next: Albertans to decide path forward for the province" (press release, Government of Alberta, 5 May 2025), <https://www.alberta.ca/>.

exemplify this approach:<sup>3</sup> a lever designed to extract concessions from Ottawa rather than to precipitate rupture. Yet from a strategic standpoint, such rhetorical brinkmanship matters. It signals that constitutional strain can be weaponized domestically—and that under conditions of acute political crisis or prolonged institutional deadlock, previously unthinkable outcomes could move rapidly into play.<sup>4</sup>

For US planners, the implication is straightforward. Alberta's separation remains improbable. But improbability is not immunity. In moments of constitutional impasse or national crisis, political equilibria can shift abruptly. That alone is sufficient justification for contingency planning by the United States, whose security interests would be directly and immediately engaged by any such rupture within Canada.

From Washington's perspective, an independent Alberta would directly engage core US interests across multiple dimensions. First and foremost is continental defense. The binational NORAD alliance ties US and Canadian defense of North American airspace into an integrated command structure that relies on assets located in Alberta.<sup>5</sup> For decades, Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Cold Lake in Alberta has hosted Royal Canadian Air Force fighter squadrons on 24/7 alert as part of NORAD's aerospace control mission. The CF-18 Hornet jets that serve as Canada's primary air defense fighters are based principally at Cold Lake (4 Wing) and at Bagotville, Quebec. This means Alberta's territory is not just a Canadian concern but a linchpin of North American air sovereignty. Any disruption to operations at Cold Lake—whether due to uncertainty over basing rights, personnel loyalty, or command-and-control—would risk a gap in the continent's radar coverage and intercept capabilities. Beyond NORAD, Alberta hosts other defense-relevant assets, including extensive training ranges and infrastructure used by allied forces. The US interest lies in uninterrupted aerospace warning and defense, regardless of Alberta's

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<sup>3</sup> Alberta's Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (Bill 14) significantly altered the province's democratic framework by removing constitutional and jurisdictional filters on citizen initiatives, stripping Elections Alberta of its authority to refer petitions for judicial review, and transferring gatekeeping power to the Justice Minister. These changes nullified prior court challenges and allowed stalled initiatives—including a sovereignty referendum petition—to restart immediately. While the Act affirms that referendum outcomes cannot override Canada's Constitution, its passage created a legal gray zone and centralized political control over contentious initiatives, marking a pivotal moment in Alberta's separatist movement and Canadian federal politics. For the official fact sheet associated with the Act, visit <https://www.alberta.ca/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jason Markusoff, "How a UCP bill renewed Alberta separatist bid to force referendum, after court shot it down," *CBC*, 13 December 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/>; and Matthew Black, "Basically in campaign mode': Alberta separatists launch renewed referendum push after Bill 14 passes," *Edmonton Journal*, 14 December 2025, <https://edmontonjournal.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> "Future Fighter Capability Project" (fact sheet, Government of Canada, 6 October 2025), <https://www.canada.ca/>; and "Alberta, Canada's New Arsenal?," *The News by Alberta Counsel*, 23 October 2025, <https://www.albertacounselnews.com/>.

internal status. The sudden relocation of what would become a new international boundary through the NORAD architecture raises questions about overflight rights, sensor data-sharing, and the legal status of US military support personnel or technology on Albertan soil. In short, Alberta's independence could inject friction into the most integrated defense partnership in the world.

A second US interest is energy security and economic stability. Alberta is often described as the engine of Canada's energy sector—a description hardly exaggerated given that Alberta contains the vast majority of Canada's oil and natural gas reserves. The province's oil sands constitute one of the largest petroleum reserves on the planet, holding an estimated 168 billion barrels of recoverable oil—the third-largest oil reserves in the world behind only Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.<sup>6</sup> Alberta's production of crude oil, at roughly 4.3 million barrels per day in recent years, accounts for approximately 84 percent of Canada's total oil output.<sup>7</sup> The United States is the primary market for this resource: more than 97 percent of Canada's crude oil exports go to the United States under current arrangements (Alberta contributed more than 87 percent of that),<sup>8</sup> and as of 2024 Canada supplied approximately 62 percent of all foreign oil imports into the United States.<sup>9</sup> Alberta alone was the source of roughly one-third of US imported crude oil by the mid-2010s, and that share has only grown as US refineries have become optimized for Alberta's heavy crude. Indeed, many American refineries are heavily dependent on Alberta's oil; for example, facilities in Illinois and Montana routinely run on more than 90-percent Alberta feedstock.<sup>10</sup> This interdependence means that a political upheaval affecting Alberta's oil and gas industry could reverberate through North American energy markets. A disruption in Alberta's pipeline network or uncertainties over a new government's export policies might induce price volatility and supply shortfalls, absent swift mitigating actions. The US objective would be to assure stable energy supply chains and market confidence even in the face of Alberta's constitutional upheaval. That entails preventing any coercive leverage over

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<sup>6</sup> "Alberta's Oil Reserves Compared to Other Countries" (fact sheet, Government of Alberta, n.d.), <https://open.alberta.ca/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Provincial and Territorial Energy Profiles – Alberta" (fact sheet, Government of Canada, 10 September 2024), <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Market Snapshot: Almost all Canadian crude oil exports went to the United States in 2023" (press release, Canada Energy Regulator, 21 August 2024), <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/>.

<sup>9</sup> US Energy Information Administration, "Petroleum & Other Liquids: Imports by Country of Origin," 2025, <https://www.eia.gov/>.

<sup>10</sup> US Energy Information Administration, "Canada's crude oil has an increasingly significant role in U.S. refineries," *Today in Energy*, 1 August 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/>; and Mitch Anderson, "Tariffs Likely to Crater Canadian Crude Exports to U.S., Marathon Tells Investors," *Energy Mix*, 13 March 2025, <https://www.theenergymix.com/>.

energy transit (for instance, if a newly sovereign Alberta or a hostile third party tried to manipulate pipeline flows or tolls) and avoiding price shocks that could affect inflation and economic security.

Third, the creation of a new international frontier along the 49th parallel west of the Great Lakes would introduce border security and law enforcement challenges. The US–Canada border is the longest undefended land border in the world and has been managed through close cooperation and trusted institutions. However, if Alberta becomes a separate country, the portion of border between Montana (and a small section of northwest North Dakota) and Alberta would overnight become a new US–Alberta border distinct from the US–Canada border. Even if Alberta were to inherit the infrastructure and personnel from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) in the short term, the legal basis for border operations, customs enforcement, and immigration control would need to be reconceived. Any enforcement gaps could be quickly exploited by transnational criminal networks. Experience shows that when new international boundaries emerge without robust controls, illicit flows of goods and people often surge until governance catches up.<sup>11</sup> In Alberta’s case, one can envision risks such as smuggling of firearms, narcotics, or other contraband if organized crime groups sense that Alberta’s fledgling border security agency is overwhelmed. Furthermore, divergent laws or regulations (for example, on firearm ownership or cannabis, where US and Canadian policies already differ) might create enforcement seams that criminals target. The United States has a vital interest in preventing the emergence of a porous border to its north, which could endanger American communities or become a conduit for terrorism and organized crime. This interest extends to cybersecurity as well: Alberta’s energy infrastructure (pipelines, power grids) is deeply connected to the United States, and any cybersecurity lapses during a chaotic transition could have cross-border consequences.<sup>12</sup> Maintaining tight coordination on critical infrastructure protection and cyber threat intelligence sharing with any new Alberta authorities would be essential to prevent hostile actors from capitalizing on the moment of transition.

Finally, the United States has a strategic interest in mitigating hostile foreign influence in the event of Alberta’s independence. A newly sovereign Alberta, particularly if it lacks full initial support from Ottawa or other traditional partners,

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<sup>11</sup> David B. Carter, Bailee Donahue, and Rob Williams, “Border Barriers and Illicit Trade Flows Available for Purchase Get access Arrow,” *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (September 2024), sqae094, <https://doi.org/>; and Arie M. Kacowicz, Exequiel Lacovsky, and Daniel F. Wajner, “Peaceful Borders and Illicit Transnational Flows in the Americas,” *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 4 (2025): 727–41, <https://doi.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Pipelines” (fact sheet, Alberta Energy Regulator, June 2025), <https://www.aer.ca/>; and “Canada – US Electricity Transmission” (fact sheet, Waterpower Canada, 2025), <https://waterpowercanada.ca/>.

might become an attractive target for geopolitical competitors seeking to gain a foothold in North America. The most immediate concern would be hostile state-backed investment—for instance, efforts by Chinese state-owned enterprises or other adversarial actors to acquire stakes in Alberta’s critical oil and gas infrastructure. This is not a hypothetical worry; Canada has already grappled with the national security implications of foreign investment in Alberta’s oil patch. In 2012, the Chinese state oil company CNOOC moved to purchase Nexen Inc., a Calgary-based energy company, giving it control of billions of barrels in Alberta’s oil sands reserves. The deal prompted such misgivings in Ottawa that the Canadian government declared it would be the last approval of its kind, effectively “drawing a line in the sand” against further takeovers of Alberta’s strategic oil assets by state-owned firms. US regulators, too, scrutinized the CNOOC–Nexen transaction closely through the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), as Nexen owned assets in the Gulf of Mexico, reflecting lingering distrust of Chinese investment in sensitive sectors.<sup>13</sup> If Alberta were on its own, desperate for capital and international recognition, it might be even more susceptible to investment overtures from countries like China or others looking to secure energy resources or influence. The risk is not only economic but also security-related: foreign control over energy infrastructure could translate into leverage over Alberta’s policies or even physical access for espionage or sabotage. Additionally, a new Alberta government might lack the sophisticated regulatory safeguards and intelligence apparatus to vet foreign deals or counter malign influence. Apart from investment, adversaries could use propaganda and disinformation to exacerbate the separation for their advantage—indeed, analysts have noted that Russian information operations have at times sought to amplify Western Canadian separatist narratives to undermine allied unity.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the US interest is to deny any strategic “capture” of Alberta by hostile powers, whether through economic dependency or informational manipulation, and to ensure a friendly Alberta remains anchored in the Western alliance network.

In summary, Alberta’s hypothetical independence touches on an array of US strategic equities: the seamless functioning of NORAD and defense agreements, the stability of North American energy supplies, the integrity of a new stretch of international border, and the broader balance of influence in North America.

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<sup>13</sup> “Canada OK’s Foreign Energy Takeovers, Slams Door On More,” *CNBC*, 8 December 2012, <https://www.cnbc.com/>; and Geoffrey Hale, “CNOOC-Nexen, State-Controlled Enterprises and Canadian Foreign Investment Policies: Adapting to Divergent Modernization,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 2 (2014): 349–73, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> Zach Laing, “Canada, Wexit, and the federal election targeted in Russian disinformation campaign, academics say,” *Calgary Herald*, 3 November 2019, <https://www.calgaryherald.com/>.

Having outlined the stakes, the next sections analyze each of these domains in detail, identifying specific risks on the horizon and potential mitigating strategies the United States should consider in its quiet contingency planning.

## **Continental Defense Implications: NORAD and Beyond**

Continental defense is the arena in which Alberta's hypothetical independence would register first—and most dangerously—on US national security interests. Unlike trade, diplomacy, or even energy markets, aerospace warning and air defense tolerate no pause, no ambiguity, and no jurisdictional confusion. NORAD functions on the assumption of uninterrupted geographic access, integrated command authority, and seamless legal arrangements across the North American interior. Alberta's territory is embedded deeply within that system. Any political rupture that alters sovereignty over key basing, sensors, or airspace would therefore confront US defense planners with immediate operational questions, not abstract alliance concerns. This section examines how Alberta's independence could disrupt NORAD's architecture, identifies the specific vulnerabilities such a transition would expose, and outlines the imperatives for maintaining continuous aerospace defense regardless of political outcomes north of the border.

### ***NORAD Basing and Aerospace Control***

The most urgent operational concern posed by Alberta's independence would be preserving the integrity of North America's aerial defense shield. Under NORAD's binational structure, Canada's territory—including Alberta—is integral to early warning and fighter interception coverage against potential air threats. 4 Wing Cold Lake, Alberta, serves as one of the two primary Royal Canadian Air Force fighter bases (alongside Bagotville in Quebec) responsible for NORAD quick-reaction alert missions. From Cold Lake, Canadian CF-18 Hornets can rapidly deploy to intercept unknown aircraft approaching North American airspace from the northwest approaches or to patrol the high north.<sup>15</sup> The personnel at Cold Lake have “stood guard to defend North America” continuously for decades, embodying the seamless cooperation of US and Canadian forces under NORAD. If Alberta were to become independent, this mission cannot simply pause while political negotiations unfold. Any hiatus in operations out of Cold Lake could create a dangerous gap in coverage, especially given the increasing activity of Russian long-range aviation that routinely probes North American air defenses.

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<sup>15</sup> “4 Wing Cold Lake” (fact sheet, Royal Canadian Air Force, 15 November 2024), <https://www.canada.ca/>.

Thus, the United States would need to ensure NORAD continuity from day one of Alberta's sovereignty. In practical terms, this may require quickly negotiating Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) or interim basing rights with Alberta's new authorities. One mitigation strategy is for US and Canadian defense officials, through US Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and Canadian Joint Operations Command, to develop prenegotiated arrangements that could be activated in the event of independence. For example, Canada (or Alberta, post-independence) could agree in principle to host US liaison teams or even temporarily assign operational control of Alberta-based radar stations and airfields to NORAD's US commander until a permanent bilateral defense accord with Alberta is signed. Planning should also identify deployable communications and sensor packages that the United States could rapidly put in place to backstop any loss of data from Alberta-based installations. For instance, if command-and-control links between NORAD's headquarters and Alberta sites were disrupted by the political transition, the United States could deploy mobile radar systems or airborne early warning aircraft to cover blind spots. Similarly, surge basing options in adjacent areas (such as in Montana or other Canadian provinces) could be readied to host fighter assets if Cold Lake's status were uncertain. This might involve upgrading airfields in Montana or North Dakota to accommodate NORAD-alert fighters on short notice. The goal of these quiet preparations is to avoid any lapse in aerospace warning and control, thereby denying potential adversaries the temptation to test North American defenses during a moment of political distraction.

### ***Command and Alliance Considerations***

An independent Alberta would also raise longer-term questions about alliance relationships. Canada and the United States have enjoyed a uniquely intimate defense partnership—from NORAD to integrated plans under NATO—all predicated on Canada's integrity as a nation. If Alberta breaks away, both Ottawa and Edmonton (Alberta's capital) would have to decide how to structure their defense policies.<sup>16</sup> The remainder of Canada would retain its NATO membership and NORAD commitments but might lose significant defense infrastructure and personnel located in Alberta. Alberta, for its part, would need to rapidly build the foundations of a national military or defense force. The United States has a strong interest in ensuring Alberta aligns with Western defense structures rather than becoming a weak link. Therefore, US strategists should consider options to embed

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<sup>16</sup> For the author's take on this matter, see: Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, "A Sovereign Alberta: The Prudent Path to a National Defense," *LinkedIn*, 31 October 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/>.

Alberta into existing defense frameworks as swiftly as politically feasible. One option could be inviting Alberta to become an adjunct partner in NORAD or a similar bilateral accord. Though NORAD has historically been a US–Canada-only treaty, creative diplomacy might allow Alberta to be associated in a temporary capacity (for example, Alberta could permit Canadian and US NORAD operations on its soil via a trilateral memorandum).<sup>17</sup> In the longer run, Alberta could seek full NATO membership, which the United States might quietly encourage to cement the collective defense guarantee over North America’s entire geography. However, pursuing NATO membership would be politically delicate—it would require consensus of all NATO allies, including Canada. Ottawa’s acquiescence might depend on the amicability of the divorce. As an interim measure, the United States might pursue a bilateral security guarantee or defense cooperation agreement with Alberta, analogous to a mutual defense pact, to formalize commitments to its defense. This could be modeled on US alliances with other small nations, tailored to North American specifics.

Throughout this process, discretion is key. Publicly, US officials would likely reiterate support for Canada’s territorial integrity up until the point of an official secession. Privately, however, US defense planners should maintain open lines of communication with Canadian counterparts about how to handle NORAD assets in Alberta. Ideally, any transition of defense responsibilities would be coordinated trilaterally among Washington, Ottawa, and Edmonton to prevent misunderstandings. The worst outcome would be a three-way breakdown in which, for example, Canadian forces withdraw from Alberta and Alberta refuses outside help, leading to an undefended airspace sector. To preempt such a scenario, contingency authorities for joint operations on Alberta’s territory should be mapped out in advance. This might even include draft legal frameworks for temporarily integrating Alberta’s airspace into US homeland defense in an emergency (with Alberta’s consent), until Alberta establishes its own Air Force capabilities. While such measures would be extraordinary, they underline the imperative: North America’s defense cannot be put on hold. In summary, a combination of preplanned agreements, rapid-deployment options, and alliance diplomacy will be required to maintain the shield of North American defense seamlessly through Alberta’s potential transition.

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<sup>17</sup> Canada and United States, *Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)*, signed April 28, 2006, in force May 12, 2006, <https://www.norad.mil/>.

## **Energy Security and Economic Implications**

Energy security is where Alberta's independence would intersect most directly with US economic stability. The United States does not merely import energy from Canada; it is structurally intertwined with Alberta's oil and gas production through pipelines, refineries, and long-term commercial dependencies that cannot be rapidly reconfigured. Political disruption affecting Alberta's regulatory authority, transit guarantees, or investment environment would therefore transmit almost immediately into US energy markets, with implications for prices, industrial output, and strategic resilience. This section assesses how Alberta's secession could affect North American energy flows, identifies the points of greatest vulnerability in the integrated US–Canada energy system, and evaluates the policy options available to Washington to preserve supply continuity and market confidence during a period of constitutional upheaval.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Oil and Gas Flows***

Alberta's independence would send shockwaves through North American energy markets, but smart planning can blunt the impact. Alberta currently functions as the cornerstone of Canada–US energy trade. The integrated “vast handshake of pipelines and refineries” between Canada and the United States has only grown tighter in recent years. US refiners have grown more reliant than ever on Canadian heavy crude—by 2024 Canada supplied nearly two-thirds of US oil import volumes, a dramatic rise from just 16 percent in 2005. This heavy oil complements US domestic light oil, strengthening overall North American energy security. Much of that Canadian oil comes from Alberta's oil sands, and is delivered via major cross-border pipeline systems. The Keystone pipeline system, the Enbridge Mainline/Lakehead system, and other pipelines connect Alberta's fields to refineries in the US Midwest and Gulf Coast. In addition, Alberta exports natural gas to the Pacific Northwest and Midwest US through pipeline networks, and electricity trade exists at the provincial-state grid interties. These conduits represent lifelines of continental energy interdependence.<sup>19</sup>

A secession scenario raises critical questions: Will those pipelines and supply contracts continue uninterrupted? Who will control the taps—Alberta's new government, or some interim Canadian-Alberta authority? Could political disputes

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor MacPherson and Gabriel Giguère, “Canada's Energy Future Lies in Deeper North American Integration,” MEI, November 2025, <https://www.iedm.org/>.

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Jaremko, “Explained: Why Canadian oil is so important to the United States,” Canadian Energy Centre, 30 January 2025, <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/>.

lead to a cutoff or rerouting of energy flows? The worst-case risk is that uncertainty or brinksmanship causes a transit or pricing disruption. For instance, imagine Alberta and Canada haggling over pipeline ownership or transit fees for pipelines that cross Canadian soil (such as Trans Mountain or the Enbridge lines that go east through Saskatchewan and Manitoba). If negotiations turned acrimonious, flows could be curtailed, causing a supply crunch at US refineries dependent on that oil. Even absent an intentional cutoff, market psychology might treat Alberta's independence as an unpredictable supply shock, bidding up oil prices. The impact of such volatility would be high: US consumers could see fuel price spikes, and industries reliant on steady petroleum and gas supplies might suffer. In the 1970s, oil shocks taught the United States the strategic costs of supply disruption, and while Alberta is a friendly source, political upheaval can induce similar effects if not managed.

To mitigate these risks, the US government should undertake rigorous contingency modeling. The Department of Energy (DOE) and Treasury ought to model market impacts under various disruption scenarios. These would include scenarios like a temporary halving of Alberta oil exports, a rerouting of exports solely through the United States, or a price renegotiation on pipeline tariffs. By understanding the potential price and supply ramifications, the United States can prepare countermeasures. One obvious step is to ensure the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve and strategic stockpiles are ready to buffer short-term supply interruptions.<sup>20</sup> Another is to explore long-term supply contracts with Alberta's producers or government that lock in certain export volumes to US buyers. Such contracts, possibly guaranteed or facilitated by the US government, could provide market confidence that even in a new sovereign context, Alberta's oil will keep flowing south. The United States might also encourage Alberta to continue honoring existing pipeline contracts and regulations to reassure investors.

A parallel strategy is to diversify energy transit routes that bypass potential chokepoints. In practice, Alberta sends the bulk of its US-bound crude exports by pipeline. Using Canada Energy Regulator (CER) 2024 data and scaling by Alberta's share of national export volumes, one can estimate that roughly 89 percent of Alberta's US-bound crude exports move by pipeline, with the remainder of approximately USD 9.8 billion moving by rail and marine. Truck ("road") movements

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<sup>20</sup> "Strategic Petroleum Reserve" (fact sheet, US Department of Energy, 2025), <https://www.energy.gov/>. The SPR exists to buffer short-term supply disruptions, but its importance is magnified by recent policy decisions. In 2024, the Biden administration authorized historically large drawdowns—reducing the SPR to its lowest level since the early 1980s—in an effort to stabilize fuel prices ahead of the presidential election. This depletion leaves the United States with diminished capacity to absorb shocks from geopolitical or structural disruptions, such as those that could arise from Alberta's independence, making rapid replenishment and readiness a critical priority for energy security.

of crude are negligible and reported with pipeline in CER statistics.<sup>21</sup> If post-independence disputes jeopardized pipelines that cross the remaining Canadian territory (for example, if Ottawa imposed conditions on pipelines crossing its land to reach US markets), one solution would be to expand direct US–Alberta corridors. The long-discussed Keystone XL pipeline, which would have provided an express route from Alberta to the US Gulf Coast, is a case in point. Its cancellation left Alberta seeking other outlets, including increasing crude-by-rail. In a scenario where Alberta is independent and perhaps at odds with Ottawa, the logic of reviving or enlarging pipeline connections entirely through US territory becomes stronger.<sup>22</sup> The United States might find strategic value in supporting such projects (subject to environmental safeguards) to ensure it can import Alberta’s oil without third-party interference. As US Senator John Hoeven (R–ND) observed during the Nexen deal deliberations, “time doesn’t stand still”—if America delays pipelines, Canadian (or Albertan) oil will find other markets. In this case, “other markets” could even mean Asia via new pipelines to the Pacific, potentially financed by China.<sup>23</sup> It is in US interests to instead channel Alberta’s exports southward where they bolster North American energy independence. Therefore, a contingency plan could be to fast-track approvals for pipeline expansions from Alberta into the United States, if triggered by an independence situation.

### ***Regulatory and Policy Continuity***

Another aspect to consider is how Alberta’s energy regulatory framework would evolve post-secession. Currently, Alberta’s oil and gas operations are governed by Canadian federal export permits (for cross-border pipelines) in conjunction with provincial regulations. Upon independence, Alberta would assume full control of its export permitting and environmental oversight. The United States should be prepared to quickly engage Alberta’s new regulators to harmonize standards and ensure continuity of safety and environmental monitoring. Any lapses could risk accidents or outages (for instance, pipeline spills that halt operations). US agencies like the Department of Transportation (which oversees pipeline safety through the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration) and the Energy Depart-

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<sup>21</sup> Canada Energy Regulator, “Crude Oil Export Summary Figure Data (2024),” 15 December 2025, <https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/>.

<sup>22</sup> Kyle Bakx, “After losing billions of dollars on Keystone XL and tank cars, Alberta is pursuing another pipeline,” CBC, 2 October 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/>; and “Canadian Leader Ready To Work With Trump To Restart Keystone XL Pipeline,” *Teamsters National Pipeline*, 23 January 2025, <https://www.teamsterpipe.ome.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> “CNOOC-Nexen Deal Wins US Approval, Its Last Hurdle,” *CNBC*, 12 February 2013, <https://www.cnbc.com/>.

ment could offer technical assistance to an independent Alberta in standing up its regulatory bodies.<sup>24</sup> This serves a dual purpose: it protects against infrastructure mishaps and builds goodwill, anchoring Alberta's practices to North American norms rather than, say, cutting corners under pressure from less scrupulous investors.

Economically, Alberta's independence could also affect currency and trade. If Alberta launched its own currency or faced capital flight, its ability to fund oilfield operations might waver, indirectly threatening output. The Treasury Department might quietly analyze how to stabilize Alberta's economy (for example, via swap lines if they kept the Canadian dollar initially, or other measures) to prevent a financial crisis that would imperil energy production.<sup>25</sup> All these measures tie back to the core aim of energy stability: keeping oil, gas, and electricity flowing predictably to American consumers and industries.

In summary, the US energy strategy in an Alberta secession scenario would involve advanced planning and agile response. By modeling disruptions, securing alternative routes, locking in supply agreements, and assisting with regulatory continuity, Washington can substantially reduce the risk of an energy shock. The tone should be cooperative—Alberta would rely on oil revenues and has every incentive to maintain exports, so the US role is to facilitate that continuity. The worst-case fear of Alberta “turning off the taps” is unlikely unless provoked; more plausible is short-term turmoil or third-party meddling. With calm contingency planning, the United States can reassure markets that North American energy security will endure, political changes notwithstanding.

## **Border Security and Law Enforcement Challenges**

The creation of a new international border is never a benign administrative act; it is a security event. An independent Alberta would transform a lightly governed segment of the US–Canada frontier into a distinct international boundary overnight, introducing legal, institutional, and operational uncertainties precisely where continuity has long been assumed. Border enforcement functions that currently operate on trust, shared databases, and integrated command relationships would have to be reconstituted under a new sovereign authority, with inevitable transitional gaps.<sup>26</sup> This section examines how Alberta's independence could stress US border security and law enforcement cooperation, identifies the risks such gaps

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<sup>24</sup> US Department of Transportation “PHMSA's Mission,” 2025, <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/>.

<sup>25</sup> Tristan Loa and David Wessel, “What are Federal Reserve swap lines?,” *Brookings*, 21 August 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

<sup>26</sup> “Canada–United States relations” (fact sheet, Government of Canada, 10 November 2025, <https://www.international.gc.ca/>).

would pose to homeland security, and outlines the measures necessary to prevent criminal exploitation, illicit flows, and enforcement degradation during a period of political transition.

### ***New Border, New Risks***

The birth of an international border between the United States and Alberta would be unprecedented in North America's modern history. Today, that line on the map is simply part of the long US–Canada frontier, guarded cooperatively by the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the CBSA, with routine policies under the umbrella of bilateral frameworks. Post-secession, however, the United States would suddenly face a direct border with a new state—one that initially might lack a fully-formed border security institution. The number of ports of entry on the Montana–Alberta boundary is relatively few (Montana and Alberta share six land crossings, only one of which—Coutts/Sweet Grass—is open 24 hours).<sup>27</sup> In normal times, trade and travel across this stretch, though significant for the region, is not as dense as the Ontario–Michigan crossings. Annual bilateral trade between Montana and Canada is about USD 6.9 billion, with Alberta accounting for roughly USD 2.2 billion of Montana's imports (primarily oil, gas, and related products).<sup>28</sup> Thousands of vehicles and travelers transit those border posts each day under established procedures. The immediate worry is that any administrative vacuum or confusion at the moment of Alberta's independence could disrupt this orderly flow and create openings for illicit activity.

One scenario to avoid is a lapse in coverage where, for example, CBSA officers withdraw because Alberta is no longer part of Canada, and Alberta has not yet deployed its own border agency. The United States cannot unilaterally police the Canadian side of the line; therefore, ensuring that Alberta can fulfill border control duties from day one is crucial. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should quietly engage with Canadian and Albertan counterparts on provisional border management arrangements. For instance, an agreement could be crafted whereby Alberta contracts with Canada or a private entity for border services in the transition period. Alternatively, Alberta could rapidly stand up a small border guard service with training and mentorship from the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) or even US CBP advisors. Predrafting a memorandum of under-

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<sup>27</sup> "Ports of Entry between Alberta and Montana," *Waterton Park Tourism*, 2025, <https://www.watertonpark.com/>; and "Sweetgrass–Coutts Border Crossing," *ezbordercrossing.com*, 2025, <https://www.ezbordercrossing.com/>.

<sup>28</sup> Montana Department of Labor and Industry, "Montana Economy at a Glance: Canada Trade," 2025, <https://lmi.mt.gov/>; and Government of Alberta, "Montana and Alberta: Strong Partners, Trusted Neighbors," 2025, <https://www.alberta.ca/>.

standing (MOU) to this effect would save valuable time. The MOU might outline how to handle customs processes, information sharing on entrants of interest, and division of responsibilities at each port of entry during the handover.

### ***Enforcement and Surveillance***

Beyond the ports of entry, the bigger concern is the “between ports” border—the open areas of vast prairie, forest, and mountain where smuggling or illicit crossings could occur. Currently, US and Canadian law enforcement cooperate closely through Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBET) that patrol and monitor such areas, leveraging intelligence from both sides.<sup>29</sup> An independent Alberta would necessitate forging a new bilateral law enforcement partnership. The United States should aim to transpose existing cooperative models onto the US–Alberta context as seamlessly as possible. This could involve quickly negotiating cross-designation of officers or at least communication channels between US Border Patrol sectors and whatever law enforcement Alberta authorizes for border security (perhaps a branch of a new Alberta national police or a specialized border unit). Joint training exercises or tabletop simulations would greatly aid preparation. For example, DHS and the Alberta authorities could run a tabletop exercise on responding to a detected cross-border smuggling incident post-independence—this would identify gaps in pursuit authorities or communications that can be fixed ahead of time.

One known risk is that criminal organizations might test the new border for weaknesses. In recent history, law enforcement has noted an uptick in organized crime exploiting any lapse in cross-border vigilance. The 2022 truckers’ blockade at Coutts, Alberta—while a political protest—led to weapons seizures and exposed how a border disruption can attract violent elements.<sup>30</sup> It underscored the importance of intelligence sharing; in that case, the RCMP, with information from partners, intercepted a cache of firearms and arrested individuals allegedly plotting violence at the border. In a similar vein, the United States and Alberta will need to sustain real-time intelligence sharing about emerging threats. This could be facilitated by extending programs like the Shiprider joint maritime patrol (in Great Lakes) concept to land: mixed teams or at least co-located command centers that watch the border together. A near-real-time data-sharing system on border crossings and enforcement actions, possibly through an integrated database or network

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<sup>29</sup> US Department of Homeland Security, “Beyond the Border Action Plan: Integrated Border Enforcement Teams,” 1 August 2024, <https://www.dhs.gov/>.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Alden, “Canada’s Trucker Protests: What to Know About the ‘Freedom Convoy,’” Council on Foreign Relations, 11 February 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/>; and Mack Lamoureux, “Police Make ‘Freedom Convoy’ Arrests, Find Guns, Body Armour, and Machete,” Vice, 14 February 2022, <https://www.vice.com/>.

accessible to both US and Alberta officials, would help ensure continuity of surveillance coverage. Practically, this means Alberta should be brought into existing information systems like lookout lists, smuggling trend analyses, and so forth, just as US and Canadian agencies currently exchange such data.

### ***Immigration and Customs Controls***

Another layer of complexity is immigration control. On Day 1 of independence, Alberta would presumably assume responsibility for immigration visas and refugee policy on its territory. The United States might face new questions: Will travelers from Alberta require distinct documentation? How to treat goods and trucks coming from Alberta vs. those from Canada? Initially, the simplest path might be treating Alberta as if it were Canada for customs purposes until told otherwise—for example, honoring existing country-of-origin provisions for Alberta goods under the US–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) unless and until Alberta negotiates new terms.<sup>31</sup> Over time, separate trade agreements would be needed. US CBP would need guidance on tariff schedules and import rules for an independent Alberta. A proactive approach is for the Office of the US Trade Representative and DHS to quietly draft a contingent trade facilitation plan—essentially a template by which Alberta could be slotted into the current US–Canada trade framework with minimal disruption, perhaps as an associate member to USMCA in the short term. This would help avoid immediate tariffs or customs holdups that could slow commerce and divert law enforcement attention.

From a security standpoint, one worry is if Alberta's new immigration system is more lax or differently managed—could that become a backdoor for inadmissible persons to enter the United States? For instance, if Alberta were to offer visa-free travel to countries that the United States and Canada currently require visas from, there might be a pathway for bad actors to attempt entry via Alberta. To mitigate this, the Department of State and DHS should engage Alberta on aligning visa policies and perhaps establishing a preclearance or pre-inspection regime. The United States has preclearance arrangements in some Canadian airports, allowing US officers to screen travelers before they depart for the United States. A similar concept could be extended to an Alberta context: if Edmonton or Calgary remain major international air gateways, the United States could negotiate to station CBP preclearance teams there, ensuring travelers and goods are vetted under US standards before crossing. This is particularly important if Alberta's separation leads to divergent foreign relationships; for example, if Alberta were to open its doors to investment or

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<sup>31</sup> Office of the US Trade Representative, "United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement," 2020, <https://ustr.gov/>.

workers from a country under US sanctions or concern, US border controls must adapt accordingly.

In sum, the US approach to the new Alberta border should be one of rapid normalization—making the abnormal (a brand-new border authority) function as normally as possible through planning and cooperation. By drafting provisional agreements, conducting joint exercises, and maintaining intelligence sharing, the aim is to prevent any window of vulnerability where criminals sense an opening. The border must remain secure and efficient, reassuring both the local communities and the broader public that security will not be compromised. The contingency preparations by DHS/CBP within the first 90 days should include ready-to-implement frameworks for customs and immigration, and even public communication strategies to guide travelers and traders (without implying US endorsement of secession). With these measures, the United States can manage the transition such that, from a security standpoint, the 49th parallel west of Saskatchewan remains as controlled and cooperative as it has been for over a century.

### **Foreign Influence and Strategic Investment Threats**

Periods of political transition create opportunity—not only for reform, but for exploitation. A newly sovereign Alberta would emerge into the international system with vast resource wealth, urgent capital requirements, and incomplete security institutions, a combination that historically attracts the attention of adversarial powers seeking leverage rather than partnership. For the United States, the principal concern would not be Alberta's independence itself, but the possibility that external actors could use investment, information operations, or covert influence to gain strategic footholds in the North American interior. This section analyzes the vulnerabilities an independent Alberta would face during its formative period, assesses the risks posed by hostile state-backed investment and influence campaigns, and considers how US policy can help prevent the emergence of a new vector of strategic penetration within the Western hemisphere.

#### ***Vulnerabilities of a New State***

A newly independent Alberta, while rich in resources, would likely find itself in a moment of economic and strategic vulnerability. It would need international recognition, trading relationships, and investment to develop its infrastructure beyond what it inherited. During this formative period, adversarial state actors may see an opportunity to extend their influence. The two primary channels of concern are financial/economic leverage and political influence operations. Both China and Russia (among others) have histories of exploiting openings in allied

countries during times of transition or instability. The United States and Canada have been cautious about Chinese encroachment in critical sectors, as evidenced by strict investment screening and export controls. An independent Alberta might not immediately have such guardrails, making it a tempting target for well-resourced foreign entities.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Hostile Capital in Critical Sectors***

The oil and gas sector is the crown jewel of Alberta's economy and thus the biggest prize for foreign investors. Even under Canadian sovereignty, Chinese state-linked companies made significant inroads by purchasing stakes in Alberta's energy companies through the 2000s. The 2013 CNOOC acquisition of Nexen was a watershed, provoking debates in both Ottawa and Washington about the national security implications. Ultimately that deal was approved, but Canada responded by tightening its Investment Canada Act guidelines to bar future takeovers of oil sands assets by foreign state-owned enterprises.<sup>33</sup> Alberta as an independent country might not inherit those stricter rules. If faced with large budget needs or lacking domestic capital, an Alberta government could even welcome foreign investment with fewer questions asked. This raises the scenario of *strategic capture*—where a hostile power gains controlling interests in critical infrastructure or resources, thereby acquiring political influence. For example, a Chinese conglomerate might offer to finance and build a new pipeline or refinery in Alberta when Western investors hesitate, in exchange for equity and favorable long-term supply contracts. Such dependence could constrain Alberta's foreign policy alignments or allow espionage under the cover of corporate presence.

To counter this, the United States should quietly encourage and assist Alberta in establishing robust investment screening mechanisms from the outset. A framework analogous to the US CFIUS or Canada's Investment Act review should be advocated. The US Treasury and State Department could share best practices and even intelligence on suspect investors. Ideally, Alberta would adopt legislation requiring national security review of any foreign investments in sectors like energy, telecommunications, or defense-related technology. This may be challenging for a

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<sup>32</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, 4th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2012); and Elliott Abrams, Ezra Hess, and Joshua Kurlantzick, "Protecting U.S. Allies and Partners from Chinese Economic Coercion," *Asia Unbound*, 2 December 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>33</sup> Roger W. Robinson, "Standing on Guard Post-Nexen: Chinese State-Owned Enterprise and Canadian National Security," *Macdonald-Laurier Institute Commentary*, June 2013, <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/>; and "Statement Regarding Investment by Foreign State-Owned Enterprises" (press release, Government of Canada, 7 December 2012), <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/>.

small new state under pressure to attract business, but the United States can buttress their resolve by rallying Western allies to provide alternative investment. For instance, encouraging US or allied firms to invest in Alberta's oil industry or infrastructure can provide the capital Alberta needs while keeping ownership in friendly hands. An "allied financing preference" approach could be pursued: perhaps a consortium of US–Canada investors (public or private) take stakes in key pipelines or facilities to crowd out untrusted bidders. Similarly, international financial institutions (where the United States has influence) could offer loans or guarantees for Alberta's infrastructure projects, reducing temptation to accept money from authoritarian states with strings attached.

### ***Information and Political Influence***

Beyond dollars, foreign adversaries might engage in subtler influence. Russia, for example, has a playbook of amplifying secessionist or divisive movements in Western countries as a form of political warfare. Reports from 2019 indicated that Russian-linked media highlighted the nascent "Wexit" movement in Alberta, potentially to stoke internal Canadian divisions.<sup>34</sup> While Alberta's independence would by then be a reality in this scenario, Russian or other propaganda could still seek to shape the new state's orientation—perhaps pushing anti-Ottawa sentiment to hinder any future Canada–Alberta reconciliation, or sowing distrust between Alberta and the United States. It is in the US interest that Alberta emerges as a stable, pro-Western democracy, not as a client state entangled with autocratic powers. Therefore, supporting Alberta's democratic institutions and resilience to disinformation is another facet of strategic planning. The United States could extend assistance in building Alberta's capacity for counterintelligence and cybersecurity (to prevent espionage or sabotage of critical systems by foreign agents). This might resemble the aid the United States gave to new Eastern European democracies in the 1990s to professionalize their security services and guard against Russian infiltration.

Intelligence cooperation is a particularly sensitive but important area. During the transition, traditional Canadian intelligence-sharing arrangements (e.g., within the Five Eyes alliance) would technically no longer cover Alberta's territory or any new Alberta intelligence agency.<sup>35</sup> To avoid leaving a blind spot, the US Intelligence Community should be prepared to rapidly establish channels with Alberta's security

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<sup>34</sup> National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions\** (revised pursuant to subsection 21(5) of the NSICOP Act (Ottawa: Government of Canada, June 2024), <https://nsicop-cpsnr.ca/>.

<sup>35</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Five Eyes Intelligence Oversight and Review Council (FIORC)," National Counterintelligence and Security Center, n.d., <https://www.dni.gov/>.

services. This could range from stationing liaison officers to inviting Alberta's fledgling intel officials to participate in certain information exchanges by special agreement. The guiding principle is to not allow a blackout in which adversaries could operate. If, for instance, foreign spies attempt to recruit assets in Alberta's government or steal sensitive data about NORAD systems located in Alberta, both US and Canadian intelligence must detect and thwart this. An interim tripartite intelligence-sharing cell (US–Canada–Alberta) might be one solution until formal agreements can be signed with Alberta alone.

### ***Protecting Critical Infrastructure***

The risk of foreign influence also extends to critical infrastructure protection. Pipelines, power grids, and communication networks in Alberta could be targets for sabotage or cyber attack by adversaries looking to derail Alberta's transition or harm US interests. The United States already works closely with Canada on critical infrastructure security and cyber defense. Those cooperative mechanisms should be extended to Alberta. DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the DOE could include Alberta's key infrastructure in their monitoring and threat-sharing programs.<sup>36</sup> For example, if a major pipeline in Alberta (feeding US markets) experiences a cyber intrusion attempt, Alberta's operators should have direct lines to US cyber defense teams for help—much as US pipeline companies do. Establishing joint cyber threat alerts and incident response protocols with Alberta's authorities will ensure that a hack on Alberta's grid or oil facilities can be swiftly contained before it cascades into the US energy supply.

In summary, defending against hostile foreign exploitation of an independent Alberta will require a mix of preventive economic policy and active security cooperation. The United States must act as a seasoned guardian, helping Alberta put up shields (legal, financial, cyber) that it may not yet fully possess. This is a delicate task: it must be done in a spirit of respect for Alberta's sovereignty, ideally through consensus in an alliance context, rather than heavy-handedly. By doing so, the United States not only protects its own flank but also helps ensure that Alberta's freedom does not inadvertently weaken North America's collective strength. In essence, Alberta should emerge as a sturdy new link in the Western chain, not a weak point that adversaries can target.

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<sup>36</sup> US Department of Homeland Security and Public Safety Canada, *Canada–United States Action Plan for Critical Infrastructure* (Washington: DHS, updated 17 December 2020), <https://www.cisa.gov/>; Natural Resources Canada, *Canada–United States Joint Strategy for Electric Grid Security and Resilience* (Ottawa: NRCan, 2016), <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/>; and “CISA debuts 2025–2026 International Strategic Plan to boost global cybersecurity collaboration,” *Industrial Cyber*, 31 October 2024, <https://industrialcyber.co/>.

## **Policy Recommendations for US Contingency Planning**

Given the multifaceted challenges outlined above, US policymakers should adopt a proactive yet quiet approach to contingency planning for Alberta's possible independence. The following recommendations summarize key steps for the inter-agency community, aligned by functional area:

- **Maintain Discreet Strategic Foresight:** The National Security Council (NSC) should establish a small interagency monitoring cell dedicated to the Alberta situation. This cell would track political developments in Alberta–Ottawa relations (e.g., any legislative moves toward sovereignty, referendum initiatives, or negotiations breakdowns) and monitor indicators of instability or foreign meddling. A consolidated dashboard of intelligence and open-source information would enable senior US leaders to make informed decisions quickly if the contingency accelerates. Crucially, this planning must remain strictly confidential. All agencies should heed communications guidance to avoid public signaling that could be misinterpreted as US meddling. US officials engaging Canadian counterparts should emphasize routine prudence—framing any low-level discussions as part of general continuity planning for continental defense and border security, not as expressions of support for separation.
- **Defense and NORAD Continuity Planning (DOW/USNORTHCOM):** The Department of War, through US Northern Command, should develop detailed basing and command continuity options for NORAD operations involving Alberta. This entails mapping out how to sustain the NORAD mission at CFB Cold Lake and other relevant sites. Concrete actions include predrafting SOFA terms for a US–Alberta defense cooperation (to be executed if independence occurs) and identifying rapid-deployment units to fill any gaps. US Air Force and RCAF planners might conduct joint evaluations of alternative airfields and the logistics of repositioning aircraft if needed. Additionally, USNORTHCOM in coordination with NORAD should run command post exercises simulating the scenario of Alberta's independence—testing communications redundancies, binational decision-making if one partner's territory is no longer officially in the alliance, and rules of engagement for interim situations. Parallel to this, DoD lawyers should review contingency authorities for operations on foreign soil that might apply (for instance, existing bilateral treaties or emergency deployment authorities) and identify if new legal authorizations would be needed for US forces or assets to operate in Alberta for NORAD purposes.

- **Homeland Security and Border Measures (DHS/CBP):** The DHS should spearhead provisional border security frameworks in collaboration with the Departments of State and Justice. This includes drafting MOUs for maintaining border services at Alberta crossings, as well as templates for customs agreements to keep trade flowing. US CBP should prepare to possibly expand personnel or technical support at key ports of entry if requested by Alberta. Joint tabletop exercises with Canadian and Albertan counterparts would be valuable—for example, simulating how a particular border incident (a migrant surge or smuggling attempt) would be handled the day before and after Alberta’s independence. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) should likewise prepare to coordinate with a new Albertan law enforcement on organized crime matters that transcend the border. An emphasis should be placed on enhancing intelligence-sharing channels (potentially extending the IBET model) and ensuring interoperability of communication systems between US border agencies and Alberta’s security forces. Cybersecurity units within DHS should integrate Alberta’s critical infrastructure into information-sharing programs as discussed, focusing on threats to pipelines and public utilities.
- **Diplomacy and Alliance Management (Department of State):** The Department of State should quietly develop a diplomatic playbook for various Alberta secession scenarios. This includes crafting scripted messaging for use with the Canadian federal government (to reassure Ottawa of US respect for sovereignty and desire for a peaceful, lawful process) as well as with any emergent Alberta authorities (to convey US willingness to work together on mutual security and economic interests without prejudging political outcomes). Decision trees should be drawn for recognition policy: under what conditions and timing the United States would recognize an independent Alberta, coordinating ideally with allies to avoid unilateral surprises. State should also engage in contingency coordination with key allies such as the United Kingdom and NATO partners, since Alberta’s situation could have alliance implications. Importantly, US diplomats in Ottawa should be prebriefed on messaging so that if the issue suddenly moves to the front burner, they can consult with Canadian officials in a manner that calms rather than inflames. The overall diplomatic stance must be one of studied neutrality—supporting a stable outcome and encouraging dialogue between Ottawa and Edmonton, without taking sides. This behind-the-scenes preparation will enable the United States to act as a stabilizing influence when the time comes, rather than appearing reactive or unprepared.

- **Energy and Economic Contingencies (Treasury/DOE):** The Treasury Department and Department of Energy should execute advanced economic impact analyses on Alberta's potential secession. This involves quantifying exposure: identifying which US states and industries are most reliant on Alberta's oil, gas, electricity, uranium (if any), or other exports. With that mapping, DOE can determine where strategic reserves or alternate suppliers should be bolstered. The agencies should also collaborate with industry to encourage contingency supply agreements, such as options to reroute crude delivery from other sources in an emergency. On the financial side, Treasury may quietly evaluate Alberta's fiscal health and banking sector—considering whether market turmoil in Alberta could have spillovers (for example, through Canadian banks heavily invested in Alberta). If risks are found, the United States might work with international financial institutions on backstop plans (though carefully, as direct US financial intervention in an independence scenario could be politically sensitive). Additionally, Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) could begin crafting sanctions-proofing guidelines—to ensure that any US sanctions regime (e.g., against Russia or Iran) continues to be enforceable if Alberta is no longer under Ottawa's sanctions enforcement. This might mean helping Alberta establish comparable sanctions policies immediately to avoid becoming a loophole in North America for banned entities.
- **Intelligence and Counterintelligence (Intelligence Community):** The Director of National Intelligence should ensure that the US Intelligence Community devotes attention to Alberta in its collection and analysis. In particular, intelligence should monitor foreign influence activities around the Alberta issue—for instance, any indications that Russian or Chinese operatives are attempting to funnel money or propaganda into Alberta separatist groups, or positioning themselves to take advantage of a transition. Counterintelligence units (FBI, CIA) should be alert to efforts by adversaries to penetrate Alberta's political circles or military assets (for example, attempts to recruit Canadian forces members in Alberta if they are uncertain about their future). The United States could consider seconding advisors to help Alberta set up counterintelligence practices, as noted, possibly through Five Eyes channels if Canada agrees. Finally, intelligence analysts should maintain an up-to-date risk matrix of the scenario, akin to the one in the NSC briefing, continually assessing likelihoods and impacts: e.g., the likelihood of NORAD disruption, energy shock, border crime spike, and so forth, updating mitigation progress for each.

Executing these recommendations requires high-level guidance but low-profile implementation. Timetables can be sketched in advance: for example, Weeks 1–2

after a decision to ramp up quiet planning could see tasking memos and points of contact established across agencies. Weeks 3–6 might produce the first drafts of MOUs, basing options, and impact models. By Weeks 7–12, agencies could conduct initial exercises and finalize refined contingency plans. Throughout, tight interagency coordination led by the NSC will ensure that all pieces—defense, diplomatic, economic, and law enforcement—move in concert.

Above all, the tone of US preparedness must remain one of contingency planning, not advocacy. Every public-facing official should be equipped with disciplined talking points: that the United States is confident in a united Canada, that all planning is routine prudence in line with longstanding continuity practices, and that the United States will neither interfere in nor speculate on Canada's internal matters. Privately, however, US leaders should be ready to act swiftly on the plans developed if Alberta's path to independence accelerates. The strategic logic is clear—it is far easier to preplan quietly than to improvise solutions in the heat of a crisis at the heart of our continent.

## **Conclusion**

Alberta's hypothetical secession poses a rare and delicate challenge: preparing for a fundamental change in North America's geopolitical landscape without precipitating or encouraging it. For the United States, whose defense, energy, and economic ties with Canada run deep, the prospect demands a mindset of strategic prudence. This analysis has shown that while the breakup of Canada is not a scenario Washington desires, failing to prepare for it would be a grave mistake given the stakes for US national security. A sovereign Alberta would introduce discontinuities—in NORAD operations, in the flow of oil and gas, in the policing of the northern border, and in the alignment of a key piece of territory—that adversaries might seek to exploit if the United States and its allies were caught flat-footed.

To prevent that, the United States must engage in quiet, comprehensive contingency planning, leveraging its whole-of-government capabilities to mitigate risks. The recommendations provided here, from defense arrangements to diplomatic strategies, form a blueprint for such preparation. They reflect a hawkish appreciation that power vacuums and ambiguities invite challenges; therefore, US policy should aim to fill any voids preemptively—whether it be a gap in air defense coverage or an absence of investment safeguards—with American and allied solutions. At the same time, this must be balanced with diplomatic tact. Openly brandishing contingency plans could alarm Canadians and Albertans alike, or be misread as US endorsement of separatism. Thus, discretion and respect for Canadian sovereignty remain paramount in execution.

Geopolitically, a smoothly handled Alberta independence—should it come to pass—could reinforce North American security if managed well. One could envision a future where Canada and Alberta exist as friendly, democratic neighbors, both firmly in the NORAD and NATO family, jointly contributing to continental defense and North American energy independence. In that outcome, the United States would have successfully navigated the emergence of a new nation without any lapse in security or prosperity. Conversely, a poorly managed rupture could introduce enduring instability in the heart of North America—something no US policymaker or military commander would want on their watch.

In sum, the situation calls for what might be termed “forward defense” in policy planning: anticipating the next strategic horizon and quietly positioning US interests to weather it. Alberta’s secession remains a contingency, not an inevitability. But as this analysis underscores, the costs of being unprepared are simply too high. It is in exercises of foresight like this—war-gaming the what-ifs, strengthening the sinews of alliance, and hedging against strategic surprise—that the United States exemplifies prudent leadership. In the final calculation, whether or not Alberta ever raises its own flag, America’s security establishment will be judged by its readiness for any outcome. Preparing for an independent Alberta, while hoping never to see it, is the kind of sober, responsible step that keeps the peace and ensures that North America’s strategic horizons remain secure, whatever political transformations may come. 🦅

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