

Invasion

I was in Ottawa, having a casual lunch with the DND, RCMP and a wide assortment of politicians.

“So, what should we discuss?” my host asked me, as I had been speaking to Official Ottawa that morning.

I took a sip of my wine. It was almost 10:45AM. “I’m going to recommend to the Pentagon that we make plans to invade Canada as soon as possible.” Even the waiter stopped and stared at me in disbelief.

My host cracked a hesitant smile and said, “I know there is something behind those words, Winn...” and took a second sip of wine.

“Let me explain.” So I did. The argument goes as follows.

1. The world’s economy needs New York (no matter the past year’s abuses.)
2. Washington, DC is a pretty important place, too. (Boston, not so much. ☺)
3. The American Defense Department does not appreciate downtime.
4. The Northeastern U.S. power grid ties intimately with Canada. The 1965 blackout sourced to a Toronto relay failure (not the UFOs over Niagara Falls).
5. Quebec and the rest of Canada often have – shall we say – politically tumultuous altercations. Separatists are many.
6. Hydro Quebec supplies a whole lot of electricity to the American Northeast.
7. The levels of physical protection at many of the Hydro Quebec facilities would not present a substantial impediment to a hostile attack.

Therefore, I concluded to this fine group who were now on *their* second glass of wine, that in order to protect America’s economic national security, force projection capabilities and (arguably) the global economy, it was incumbent upon the U.S. to invade Canada and protect those portions of Canada’s critical infrastructures upon which we depend.

This esteem group finally relaxed as they saw what I was saying.

All of us are highly interconnected and reliant upon each other for critical services – energy distribution being about the most critical. What do we do about this – now and in the even more intertwined future? How do we declare national security assets that may not be physically located within traditional borders? Big questions, yes... but what about your company?

Any security analysis must look at myriad possibilities in all three Security Domains: The cyber, the physical and the human. In this case, I was questioning Enterprise dependency on third parties over whom we may have little control.

- Communications: Internet, conventional and cell telephones.
- Power: Backup generators, batteries, alternative power sources and smart grids.
- Financial: Electronic banking, wire transfers, integrity.

Most responsible companies employ a concept called QoS, Quality of Service, or a service contract promising certain levels of consistent reliable service. In the business world, customers and providers generally work towards a cooperative relationship, yet nothing is constant.

Just as the political fortunes and relationships between nation-states float on shifting sands, so can those of corporate buyouts, mergers and bankruptcies. Is today's partner tomorrow's adversary?

I call this Graceful Degradation. If and when your company loses pieces of critical third party supplied services (hardware, software, SaaS, cloud, etc.) how have you planned for this contingency? Did you architect your systems and business process to be binary – meaning, it's all or nothing. A major supplier's systemic problems take you down, too. Or, have you architected your networks and supply chains to operationally survive potentially destructive outages or loss of third party services?

At the more micro level, we know that a hard drive will crash, so we provide backup for mission critical data. We create a survivable level of localized Graceful Degradation. But, hypothetically, say, a company's entire backup server farm (RAID 0 and all that) dies for whatever reason. What is the plan? Backup of backup? Maybe. An abandoned missile silo in Nebraska or Alberta (you get the idea...)?

Risk analysis is complex, indeed, and the issue at hand is one of low-probability high-impact events.

Of course, the U.S. is not going to invade Canada (for at least a few months, as I understand it) and Quebec is not leaving Canada (at least for a few months, eh?).

But, from a security-risk-evaluation standpoint, we need to put everything on the table and not merely exclude it because a few execs think it's *'unlikely'*. Sure it's unlikely. But so was 9/11. So was the blackout of 1965, 1977, the northwest U.S. in 1997 and 2003. Unlikely, to be sure. But that's a heck of unlikelies to ignore.

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