

CANADIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY: REACHING A BALANCE BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND NORTH AMERICAN HARMONY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Introduction

Each time the United States makes a decision involving North American security or expresses its will to intervene abroad to defend its interests, the Canadian government experiences the constraining effects of the asymmetrical nature of its relationship with the United States and reminds itself that its room to manoeuvre is small. Ottawa faced this unpleasant reality, for instance, in 1957 when the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD) was created, or in 1962-1963 during the heated debate in Ottawa over the nuclearization of Canada's BOMARC missiles.¹ More recently, the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the issue of the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system reminded Canadians that their relationship with the Americans is complex and that the balance between Canada's autonomy and political harmony with the United States is vital but precarious.

This essay suggests some ways that could increase the stability of the balance between Canada's autonomy and its need to maintain harmony and prosperity with the United States in the twenty-first century. First, it argues that the Canadian government should adopt a North Atlantic strategy in foreign policy to expand its room for manoeuvre towards the United States in times of crises and, more specifically, in the offensive war against international terrorism. Second, it asserts that Ottawa should push for the institutionalization of the North American security perimeter to stabilize its bilateral relationship with the United States in matters of continental security. By adopting such an equilibrium approach between North Atlanticism and continental institutionalization, Canada could reduce its political vulnerability towards the United States and increase the consistency of its foreign and security policy in the twenty-first century.

In the US Offensive and Defensive (Security) Strategy

Since the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the foreign and security policies of no other US allies have been more affected than those of Canada. First, like all the other American allies, Canada responded to the US "war on terrorism" by affirming its will to participate in a mission to topple the Taliban regime in Kabul. Canada also actively participated in the NATO mission in Afghanistan (the ISAF mission) and now has over 2,800 troops in Kandahar. Second, and contrary to the other main US allies, Canada had to deal with

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¹ For more on the political constraints facing the Diefenbaker government during the creation of the North American Air Defence Command, see Jockel (2007), pp. 9-41. For more on the political crisis over the nuclearization of the Canadian BOMARC missiles, see Lentner (1976), pp. 29-66. For an interesting analysis of Canada's continental defence issues since the 1960s, see Bow (2009), pp. 40-59.

the critical issue of continental security which became central for the United States in the aftermath of 9/11. Even though President Bush showed great confidence in the protection of continental borders prior to September 11, 2001,² the position of his administration radically shifted after the attacks, and Washington made clear that the United States would focus on national security even at the expense of enduring economic sacrifices (Clarkson, 2006: 603). In this context, Canadian-American security cooperation was thoroughly examined and adapted to the security threats of the twenty-first century. The indivisible nature of North American continental security was emphasized and the principles of the “Ogdensburg Agreement”—a security accord that had been adopted by Washington and Ottawa during the Second World War—was brought to the forefront.³ Canada created, among other things, a Department of Public Safety that echoed the US Department of Homeland Security, with which Ottawa shares information. Both countries also increased cooperation at the border, established a so-called “smart border,” and adopted common immigration policies.

Thus, since 2001, Ottawa has not only been involved in the US offensive strategy toward international terrorism but was also directly affected by Washington’s defensive measures, which modified and strengthened Canadian-American continental security. For this reason, one could argue that Canada is in the hard sphere of US influence in comparison to other allies. Indeed, the Canadian government felt more pressure from Washington and has been more sensitive to US decisions since 9/11 than any other close allies.

Sharing the North American continent with the American power distinguishes Canada from other NATO or G8 members. This distinction, however, has to do with more than the simple fact of sharing a continent. It also has to do with the level of economic integration and the asymmetrical power relationship between the two states. Even though the deep economic integration between the two countries has had a positive impact on Canada’s economic growth over the last twenty years, one could argue that it has also reduced Canada’s political autonomy toward Washington.⁴ In the last few years, for instance, the Canadian business community called for the creation of a “security perimeter” with the United States in order to stop potential terrorists from entering the continent. Leaders of that community maintained that to keep the border open for trade, Ottawa had to blend its immigration and security policies with those of the United States. The CEO of Canadian Pacific even declared: “We have to make North America secure from the outside. We’re going to lose increasingly our sovereignty, but necessarily so” (Byers, 2006). Deputy Prime Minister John Manley reacted to this position by indicating that: “Working closely with the United States does not mean turning over to them the keys to Canadian sovereignty” (Wells, 2001). Prime Minister Chrétien, rejected the security perimeter approach and indicated that Canada would rather deal with United States on “specific areas of concern.”

This emotional response however failed to stop the process toward a de facto security perimeter (Roussel, 2002). The so-called “specific areas of concern” approach was, in fact, the first step

² President Bush declared: “[F]earful people build walls. Confident people tear them down.” See Gabriel & Macdonald (2008), pp. 355.

³ The Ogdensburg Agreement was signed in 1940 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Prime Minister Mackenzie King near Ogdensburg in the State of New York. By this declaration, Canada and the United States acknowledged the indivisible nature of their continental security. The United States agreed to protect Canada in case of an attack in exchange for Canada increasing its security measures on its territory. In a context where some American politicians and pundits identified Canada as part of the [security] problem following 9/11, Canada’s response to the transformation of US security policies was perceived in Ottawa as a test of the Ogdensburg Agreement.

⁴ Over 80 percent of Canada’s exports go to the American market. Five US states have Canada as their main trade partner and 33 others have Canada as their main foreign economic partner. See Molot & Hampson (2000).

toward such a perimeter. Canada and the United States developed compatible immigration databases, improved border infrastructure, established joint posting of customs officers at seaports, increased intelligence sharing, and shared airline passenger lists and criminal files.

The sensitive issue of Canada's sovereignty was not only raised over continental security policies but also over the issue of Canada's involvement in the US offensive strategy towards terrorism. When Ottawa agreed to participate in the military operation in Afghanistan in late 2001, Canadians troops were placed under Canadian command but under US operational control. Some Canadian pundits suggested then that Canada was no longer an autonomous state since it was not an independent operator in Afghanistan. Former Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy shared this point of view and commented that Canada was firmly moving into the US orbit. He declared: "It certainly seems to me that we are step by step moving to a point where our freedom to manoeuvre and to maintain some independence is really getting into some red zones."⁵

The political disagreement with Washington over the invasion of Iraq added pressure on the Canadian government. Even though Prime Minister Chrétien repeated that "[w]e are with the Americans on terrorism and terrorism is in Afghanistan" (Sallot, 2003), and even though his government deployed additional troops in Afghanistan to show deep commitment to the cause of fighting terrorism (the so-called "Afghanistan solution"), the Bush administration was irritated at Ottawa's decision to not participate in the invasion of Iraq. One week after the beginning of the US military operation, the US ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, verbalized Washington's feelings toward Canada's decision to stay out of the war: "We would be there for Canada. That is why so many in the United States are disappointed and upset that Canada is not there for us now." (Gee, 2003). The decision to stay out of Iraq, arguably one of the most important decisions of Jean Chrétien's prime ministership, was a difficult one, and many in Canada were anxious about Washington's response. Canada's expression of its independence on this issue was mainly possible because France and Germany were firmly opposed to the invasion. This created a window of opportunity for the Chrétien government to stay out of the war. Without Paris and Berlin's opposition, it is unlikely that Ottawa would have had the strength to stand up to Washington.

The political vulnerability of the Canadian government towards Washington was also reflected in Prime Minister Paul Martin's decision to take the lead of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kandahar in 2005. In order to improve diplomatic ties with the Bush administration, which had deteriorated following Canada's refusal to support the war in Iraq and to participate in the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system, the Martin government accepted this dangerous mission, even if Afghanistan was not on the top of its foreign policy priorities (Stein & Lang, 2007).

In sum, the defensive and offensive US approaches to the war against terrorism disrupted Canadian foreign and security policies, perhaps like never before. The strong and quick reaction of the United States to 9/11 probably had a bigger impact on Canada than 9/11 itself. The post-September 11 era highlighted the precarious balance between Canada's need and will to maintain its political autonomy vis-à-vis the United States, as well as the need to preserve diplomatic harmony with the United States and economic prosperity. These events

⁵ Mr. Axworthy added: "I was quite surprised, frankly, at the decision to go [to Afghanistan] under US military command and become just another unit in that arrangement. It's clear to me that the role that Canada has always played and should be playing is to be working through multilateral organizations, the UN in this case in particular." See McCarthy (2002).

also compelled Canadians to do a “reality check” and to redefine their international role for the twenty-first century—a role that could no longer stand on the mythical aspects of its Cold War foreign policy (i.e., mediation and peacekeeping missions).⁶

A Shaky Equilibrium

The significant transformation in Canadian-American security relations and the effect of the post-9/11 international environment on Canadian foreign policy led scholars to produce a burgeoning literature that tackled these issues.⁷ Most analysts agree that the United States is a core element of our foreign policy but they disagree on the path that Canada should take to remain a relevant actor in the post-9/11 era.

Most of the arguments made by scholars about Canada’s foreign and security policies are spread along the continentalist/internationalist axis.⁸ This distinction between these two conceptual approaches is currently the main fault line of our foreign policy. This division has always existed but tends to be more apparent when the Canadian government is pressed to make defining policies, as was the case after 9/11. The proponents of the continentalist approach argue that Canada’s relationship with the United States should define its policies. They maintain that Canada’s opposition to the United States hurts Canadian national interests by damaging Canadian-American relations and by isolating Canada. Continentalists assert that the best way Canada can increase its influence in the world is by supporting the United States in order to influence the course of US decisions. Hence, an excellent relationship with Washington must be maintained even at the expense of Canada’s political autonomy. In other words, Canada should put all its eggs in the continental basket if it wants to maximize its interests.

Internationalists adopt a different approach. They maintain that the Canadian government must stand up for Canada’s autonomy by defending Canadian beliefs and values, especially when US pressure is high. Canada should, therefore, strike out on its own if it wants to maintain its influence in world affairs and, to paraphrase former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, if it wants to reduce the effect of “every twitch and grunt” of the American “elephant.”

Both of these schools share the same objective: they want Canada to maximize its interests. They disagree, however, on where to place the balance between Canada’s political autonomy and its harmonious ties with Washington. Continentalists put the emphasis on Canadian-American harmony to guarantee prosperity, while internationalists focus on political autonomy, even if it stresses our relationship with Washington, and argue that this does not affect prosperity.

Toward a New Balance

Canada’s security and foreign policy response to 9/11 was indecisive and even inconsistent. Ottawa has not been strategic enough in the conduct of its foreign policy and has failed to set its national interests straight. Successive Canadian governments “navigated by sight” and their policies were more the result of intuitive thinking than sound decisions. This outcome may be partly due to the philosophical contention between the continentalists and the internationalists.

This essay argues that the balance between autonomy and harmony must not be established *within* continentalism or internationalism but rather *between* them. These schools of thought are

⁶ For more on the myths of Canadian foreign policy, see Chapnick (2000); Stairs (2003); Maloney (2005).

⁷ See, for instance, Cohen (2003); Sokolsky (2004-2005); Welsh (2004); Granatstein (2007).

⁸ For a continentalist perspective, see, for instance, Granatstein (2007). For an internationalist perspective, see Welch (2004). These authors represent dominant and opposing views in the debate.

not incompatible if Canada's national interests and plans of action are clearly divided between a foreign policy realm and a continental security realm. This essay maintains that the best way the Canadian government can establish a more stable balance between its political, diplomatic, and economic imperatives is to change what it can control in the foreign policy realm and to control what it cannot change in the continental security realm in order to increase Canada's leverage and autonomy in its asymmetrical relationship with the United States.

Resetting Canada's Foreign Policy Realm: Toward North Atlanticism

Canada should neither give in to a blind continental approach nor to a vague and naïve internationalist strategy. Those who have maintained that the only way Canada can reach a certain level of international influence is by supporting US foreign policy in order to better influence Washington's decisions are naïve. Canada's influence on United States's conduct of the war in Afghanistan since 2001 has been minimal. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's attempt to influence President Bush on the management of the war in Iraq since 2003 has not been any better. Thus, the bilateral approach, which attempts to maximize Ottawa's access to Washington's decision, does not seem to be the best means to achieve Canadian interests in foreign policy.

The opposite strategy of excessive institutional multilateralism within the United Nations (UN) has not been more successful. Yet, this has been the path chosen by the Canadian government since 2001. Ottawa has indeed emphasized the importance of a consensus within the Security Council of the United Nations on the proper means to respond to the 9/11 attacks. While empathizing with the American people in the days following September 11, 2001, the Canadian government made it clear that Canada's solidarity with the United States would not be a blank cheque for quick and blind military intervention abroad. The Chrétien government stressed the importance of a multilateral agreement with the United Nations to carry out international actions. Canada justified its participation in the *Operation Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 by the fact that the Security Council of the United Nations agreed to such an action. Fifteen months later, in the days prior to the American invasion of Iraq, the Canadian government indicated that a UN consensus was a necessary condition for Canada's participation in the mission. Prime Minister Chrétien declared in the House of Commons: "If military action proceeds without a new resolution of the Security Council, we will not participate" (McCarthy, 2003). What this position suggests is that the interests of the permanent members of the Security Council of the UN determine Canadian foreign policy—in other words, that Ottawa's interests in the war against terrorism lie in the multilateral process rather than in the security outcome. This is problematic.

Moreover, how can the Canadian government make UN multilateralism the cornerstone of its foreign policy toward Afghanistan and Iraq, while Ottawa agreed to be part of the US-led NATO intervention against Serbia in 1999, a war that had not been approved by the Security Council? This is inconsistent and contradictory. One might indicate that there was a difference between the motives of the Kosovo intervention and the Iraq invasion and that the former was more legitimate than the latter. But if we follow the logic of the Canadian government, Canada

should have stayed not only out of Iraq but also Serbia, since neither intervention received the approval of the United Nations.

The case of the NATO war against Serbia in 1999 suggests that what really matters to Ottawa is not a UN consensus but one with its main North Atlantic partners from NATO and the G7. This North Atlantic community, which shares values and norms such as liberal democracy, the rule of law, and free market economy, is roughly constituted by the United States, the United Kingdom, and states like France, Germany, and Italy, with which Canada has consistently shared broad values and interests since the Second World War. This community of values has often produced consensus on common state actions, and this seems to explain why Canada agreed to intervene in Bosnia (1995), Serbia (1999), and Afghanistan (2001), but not in Iraq (2003), as there was a profound disagreement among North Atlantic states on the necessity of regime change in Baghdad.⁹

This essay suggests that by resetting Canada's foreign policy realm in North-Atlantic multilateralism, Canada would be more consistent, more autonomous toward the United States, and more influential on the world stage. How so? First, Canada would no longer send confusing signals to the United States when an international intervention is discussed. Washington would know, right from the outset, that to get Ottawa's approval for an intervention, it would have to reach a consensus within the North Atlantic community. If the US motives for an intervention are to conform to North Atlantic values, it should not be a problem for Washington to build a consensus in which Ottawa would be part. Second, North Atlanticism would reduce the effects of the asymmetrical relationship with the United States by diluting US influence within the North Atlantic group. As a result, Canada's political autonomy vis-à-vis the United States might become less sensitive among Canadians. The criticism expressed by many Canadians in 2002, according to which Ottawa was not an autonomous actor in the war in Afghanistan disappeared once NATO took charge of the mission in August 2003. This suggests that North Atlantic multilateralism is comforting to Canadians. Finally, by becoming the champion of North Atlanticism, Canada might end up playing a mediating role between United States and our European allies when tensions occur over international issues.

The election of Barack Obama in the United States constitutes the perfect timing for the Canadian government to reset its foreign policy. The adoption of a North Atlantic strategy is unlikely to meet strong opposition in Washington as the Obama administration has emphasized the importance of a multilateral approach with its main allies on important foreign policy issues.¹⁰ Considering that an aggressive and unilateral tone could always resurface in Washington over foreign and security policy, Canada should act now to redefine its strategy and be ready to defend Ottawa's political autonomy against future US unilateral excesses.

Controlling the Continental Security Realm: Toward Formal Institutionalization

The maximization of Canada's material interests is largely guaranteed by its good relations with the United States. Since the Second World War, the United States has guaranteed Canada's

⁹ In an interesting article published in *The Globe and Mail* in 2004, former Canadian ambassador to NATO, David Wright, wrote: "In the case of Kosovo, effective multilateral instruments were employed throughout NATO for the conduct of the war, and the Group of 8 for the diplomacy to end it. Ottawa's influence on Washington was ensured because of US support for NATO and the need to maintain unity. Thus, US differences with allies were never pushed to the breaking point." See Wright (2004).

¹⁰ Barack Obama mentioned during his presidential campaign: "The goal of an Obama administration in foreign policy would be obviously to act on behalf of the interests and the security of the United States, but also to listen carefully enough to our allies that we understand their interests, as well, and we try to find ways that we can work together to meet common goals." See *The Washington Post* (2008). See also Kimball & Paquin (2008).

security (i.e., the Ogdensburg Agreement and NORAD) and the US market has had a major impact on Canada's economic growth. In fact, the continentalization of Canadian-American relations is, in the words of John Holmes, a "force of nature," and 9/11 has shown how instinctive and natural a reaction it was to deepen the continental security integration.¹¹ The reality is that we cannot change this force of nature, but we can shape its reach and its effects. Denying the existence of a security perimeter in North America, as the Canadian government has done in recent years, is unrealistic and potentially damaging for Canada's interests.

By keeping in mind that Canada is deeply involved (whether it wants it or not) in both the defensive and offensive strategy of the United States in the war against terrorism, this paper maintains that it is in Canada's strategic interest to limit the reach of the security perimeter to preserve its political autonomy.¹² This could be done in two steps. First, the integration should be institutionalized to increase Canada's legal control over the perimeter in order to downplay the asymmetrical effects of its relationship with the United States. The establishment of a formal security perimeter through a bilateral treaty (a NORAD-like agreement) would thus stabilize bilateral relations and reduce Canada's feeling of vulnerability toward the United States. Second, to retain as much political autonomy as possible, Canada should oppose a wider integration. Its contribution should be limited to issues that are directly related to North American security (anti-terrorist measures, intelligence sharing, immigration, border security, etc.) and should not be extended to matters that are indirectly related to security, such as the issue of clean water or energy. By signing a treaty on a security perimeter that establishes the "rules of the game" and by explicitly opposing the extension of the perimeter to other considerations, Canada should be able to control the continental integration.

Conclusion

The US response to 9/11 has significantly shaken Canadian foreign and security policies. Since geography is interconnected with politics, some have maintained that Canadians must put all their eggs in the North American basket. I disagree. Since there is such a strong interconnection between politics and geography in North America, continentalism must not be Canada's only guide in pursuing its interests. I rather believe that a balance between North Atlanticism and controlled continental security is clearly an avenue that Canada should explore.

This essay has argued that reaching a balance between a well-conceived foreign policy and continental security realm would allow Canada to stabilize its bilateral relationship with the United States. In the foreign policy realm, the Canadian government should become the champion of North Atlanticism to reduce its vulnerability toward the United States in times of crises. In the security realm, Canada must deepen the North American security perimeter by institutionalizing bilateral cooperation over the issues that are directly related to national security. By making this strategy public, Canada could help to stabilize the balance between political autonomy and North American harmony.

¹¹ Quoted in Roussel (2002: 22).

¹² There is no consensus on this issue. Some authors suggest that the only way to limit the perverse effect of the Canadian-American asymmetrical relationship is by institutionalizing the integration. Others suggest that both countries plus Mexico should move toward a formal political union. See Pastor (2001).

The objective here is not to take a tough stand against the United States but to inject stability and better understanding into our bilateral relations. Since 9/11, the Canadian government knows where the United States stands on foreign and security issues. It is now time for Washington to have a better understanding of where Canada stands on these matters of high importance for North America in the twenty-first century.

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