

# YO, CANADA! A WAKE-UP CALL FOR Y'ALL UP THERE



*2002 was a year of downward spiral in the bilateral relationship between Canada and the US, writes a former senior American diplomat who served in Ottawa in the 1990s. The "bilateral" has deteriorated from the high-water mark of the Mulroney-Reagan/Bush era and the camaraderie of the Chrétien-Clinton years to a new low when a Chrétien adviser called the president of the United States "a moron," a comment that was widely interpreted in Washington as being indicative of the mindset in the PM's close entourage about the Bush administration. Since the terrorist attacks, concludes David T. Jones, history has resumed, and is even on the march, at a US-dictated pace with which Canada finds itself badly out of step.*

David T. Jones

*Les relations bilatérales Canada-États-Unis se sont dangereusement envenimées au cours de l'année 2002, observe un ancien haut diplomate américain ayant résidé à Ottawa dans les années 1990. Le « bilatéralisme » avait atteint son apogée avec l'entente régnant entre un Mulroney et les deux présidents Reagan et Bush père, puis avec la camaraderie des rapports Chrétien-Clinton, mais il s'est brusquement abîmé lorsqu'une conseillère du Premier ministre canadien s'est avisée de traiter de « crétin » l'actuel président américain. Des propos généralement interprétés à Washington comme révélateurs de l'état d'esprit de l'entourage de Jean Chrétien vis-à-vis de l'administration Bush et de son approche des questions de sécurité depuis le 11 septembre 2001. Depuis les attentats terroristes, conclut David T. Jones, l'histoire a repris du service et s'est même accélérée à un rythme dicté par les États-Unis. Et le Canada se montre incapable de suivre cette cadence.*

**I**n the early through mid-1990s, US diplomats were sometimes asked about the status of our bilateral relations with Canada. At first cautiously and then with increased confidence, we responded, "never better." Bilaterally, we had negotiated the shoals of transforming the Free Trade Agreement into the trilateral NAFTA without a comprehensive renegotiation following the 1993 transition from Tory to Liberal administrations. Multilaterally, we were able to work closely on issues such as Haiti, the Gulf War aftermath, and Bosnia. While there was an inevitable, say 5 percent, of the relationship that was subject to disagreement, these problems were predictable—almost ritualistic. Hence, we would regularly address softwood lumber, Pacific Coast salmon, durum wheat, magazines, potatoes, dairy supports, civil aviation, that is, the warp and woof of the world's most lucrative and complex economic, social and cultural relationship. And on Cuba, we almost reflexively agreed to disagree—as we had done for two generations.

We could not make the same statement today.

To be sure, our previous "never better" judgment of the 1990's came at a peculiarly auspicious time: a moment when the constellation of direct bilateral and general global foreign

relations had eliminated many points of friction. Think back a moment to that "end of history" era when the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the disintegration of the USSR eliminated communism as a global ideology and sparked a burst of democratic expansion throughout Eastern Europe.

At the same time, neuralgic issues such as apartheid in South Africa, the Contras in Nicaragua, the civil war in El Salvador, and various military dictatorships in Latin America were passing from the scene. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had been repulsed and Saddam was "in his box." Following the 1993 Oslo Accord, it appeared as if Israelis and Palestinians were edging toward a peace at the same, admittedly imperfect, level as Egypt, Jordan and, ultimately, Lebanon. There were no armaments that could not be controlled. Other foreign relations issues—addressing Haiti's dictatorship and dealing with the shards of former Yugoslavia—were essentially tertiary challenges. The solutions ultimately undertaken were generally agreeable to both Ottawa and Washington.

**M**atching the largely innocuous nature of the foreign policy challenges was a felicitous concurrence of bilateral political orientations. It is a generally acknowledged verity that

Americans are concluding that Canadians believe the Bush government is somehow illegitimate; that it stole the 2000 election; that its senior officials are dangerous and probably unprincipled warmongers; and that Ottawa does not accept US policy choices as legitimate even for US interests.

Canadian political orientation is at least one step to the left of that in the US. As a consequence, Republicans are a better “fit” with “small-c conservatives,” be they Tories, Reform or Canadian Alliance, and Democrats are a better fit with Liberals. Hence when from 1984 to 1993 Mulroney’s Tories were in power, they dealt with the Reagan-Bush *père* administration, developing personal relationships of substantial intimacy. And when the Liberals came to power in 1993, they had the congenial Democrat Bill Clinton as president.

While the Clinton-Chrétien association was hardly as close as Mulroney-Bush, it went beyond the purely professional. At a low point for Clinton, immediately following the 1994 Republican congressional victory, he enjoyed an official visit to Ottawa in February 1995, received a rousing parliamentary reception, and returned to Washington with bolstered spirits. In turn, during the 1995 Quebec referendum, Clinton enhanced US support for Canadian national unity beyond our traditionally even-handed “mantra.” While Prime Minister Chrétien did not always treat Clinton with profound respect even pre-Monica (witness the open microphone dissing at the 1997 Madrid Summit where among other things he suggested Clinton’s support for NATO expansion was purely electoral politics), in return he had to endure Clinton kibitzing on his golf game.

But the combination of the 2000 Bush *files* election and the 9/11 terror attacks on New York and Washington changed both the world and key elements of our bilateral relationship. “History” has resumed.

While personal relations between national leaders can be overdrawn when placed against economic, military, cultural and geographic realities, they are not irrelevant. Historically, Canadians have been critical of US political institutions and society (marvelously recounted by S.F. Wise and Robert Brown in *Canada Views the United States* regarding 19th-century political attitudes). And modern Canadian political leaders—Diefenbaker, Pearson, Trudeau, to name a few—have elected to pick fights with the US for a range of political and/or philosophical reasons. Despite these “at sixes and sevens” snarls, the relationship continued without fire and sword, and the world’s longest undefended cliché remained such.

Thus we can be reasonably confident that the current bilateral strains can be endured, if not enjoyed. If we got past Nixon calling Trudeau an

“asshole” (in private), we can get by Chrétien (at one remove) calling Bush a “moron” (in public).

What is baffling about the current imbroglio, however, is how unnecessary it was. It takes no analytic brilliance to know that in 2000 a Liberal administration would have Preferred a Gore victory. Not only was the vice-president “well and favourably known” in Ottawa, a third Democrat government would be philosophically attuned to the Liberals and require less adjustment or “getting to know you” exercises. But professionals keep these preferences private—they don’t get them publicized as did Ambassador Raymond Chrétien in May 2000, and they certainly don’t reinforce them as the prime minister did during his North Carolina visit in November 2000. Thus Republicans came to office knowing that they were hardly Chrétien’s choice—and chitchat over A-Rod’s batting average couldn’t cover the stiffness between president and prime minister at their first encounter.

And when Chrétien had the rare second chance to make a first impression following 9/11, he mismanaged that opportunity also. He could have followed the sequence of senior global leaders such as Blair, Chirac and the Japanese prime minister by appearing at ground zero; instead, a fundraiser in Toronto apparently claimed priority. But just think for a moment of how he would have appeared alongside Tony Blair when the president addressed Congress in October 2001. With a few “peasouper” phrases of sympathy, he would have burned a positive media moment of him into our image of Canada forever. But that was not the case.

Instead, we have seen and heard a steady stream of critical, contemptuous and dismissive commentary from the prime minister and his senior subordinates that no longer verge on anti-Americanism, but cross well over that boundary. To wit:

- In a hissing match with former finance minister Martin in June, Chrétien declared that the US Congress suffers from a “democratic deficit”;
- At the G8 Summit in July, Chrétien attacked US agricultural policies as “stupid”;
- On the anniversary of 9/11, he suggested that US “arrogance” was at least partly responsible for the terrorist attacks.

And at other points during the year, John Manley declared our foreign policy “bellicose,” Pierre Pettigrew suggested the president was cowardly in his stance on softwood lumber, and in

one of his initial media interviews, Foreign Minister Graham in June belaboured virtually every element of US foreign policy for which he could form syllables. It was an amazing performance; there was not one single perceived positive example of US performance (when even a blind pig finds an occasional acorn).

Particularly amusing were the gaggle of backbench Liberal MPs who in June 2002 declared that the US should elect more Democrats in the November elections. In what never-never land were they wandering? Impertinent? Think of the outcry in Canada if Gingrich Republicans had endorsed Stockwell Day in 2000.

All of this is backdrop to the “moron” episode. Now Ms. Ducros’ comment by itself was and is irrelevant. To paraphrase Trudeau’s remark about Nixon, President Bush has been called worse things by better people. And he doesn’t need me to balance his Harvard and Yale degrees against a graduate of the Laval law faculty. Nor, once having made the remark, did it matter whether she was retained, fired or appointed to the Senate. But as an illustration of the thinking of the prime minister and the senior members of the PMO, it was definitive. Does anyone, no matter if they are now being spun like gyroscopes, believe that if senior “Chrétinites” were speaking of Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell and Rice as smart, focused, directed, organized and effective, Ms. Ducros would venture forth to label the president a moron?

Unfortunately, the Liberals are still in denial that “President Gore” is not installed at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. And what “moron” really means is, “We don’t like your policies, we don’t agree with your policies, and we hate the possibility that it might be necessary to support your policies.” That Foreign Minister Graham is now making nice with remarks about the US (for example, on missile defence), gushes with hypocrisy and must be giving him monumental indigestion as well.

By itself, that is fair enough. Our history of policy difference has been as pointed at times as our history of agreement. While we believe that our policies are correct and will stand the test of time, no person or society is omniscient. So it will be with the United States, and Ottawa may well endure to have its “last laugh” at our expense.

But what we are concluding is that Canadians believe that the Bush government is somehow illegitimate; that it stole the 2000 elec-

tion; that its senior officials are dangerous and probably unprincipled warmongers; and that Ottawa does not accept US policy choices as legitimate even for US interests, particularly as they are taken by leadership that Ottawa apparently regards as morally if not technically illegitimate. We note in passing that President Bush has not been invited to make an official visit to Ottawa (the last official visit by Chrétien to Washington was in 1997).

And, indeed, in this regard, the Chrétien government may be closely attuned to what Canadians believe. At the same time that the prime minister was announcing US “arrogance” as contributing to the 9/11 attack, a poll indicated that 85 percent of Canadians believed the US was either partially or completely at fault for 9/11. In a poll in December 2002, 38 percent of Canadians believed that Bush was more dangerous for world peace and security than Saddam Hussein. Our societies may occupy the same continent, but these attitudinal differences make one wonder whether Canadians lived through a different 2001-02 than did Americans.

There are, at this point, three major areas of Canada-US contention: border security; defence; and a mélange of foreign policy issues that, for lack of a better term, I will call the “potpourri.”

*Border Security.* Prior to 9/11, we had grown comfortable with border transit that was becoming almost as pro forma as driving from one state or province to another. Indeed, in the mid-1990s there was a casual judgment that Canadians comprised the fourth largest number of illegal aliens in the US (a report totally ignored due to our focus on our southern border and the perception that “you’re just like us.”) Today, that yesterday seems as long ago as a summer day does in February. Yes, none of the 9/11 terrorists entered the US through Canada, but the reality continues that terrorists and their supporters have operated out of Canada. It would strain credulity to believe that Ahmed Ressaam, the prospective millennium bomber for Los Angeles International Airport, was a solitary clot of manure in a field of flowers.

What we have concluded is that we must be more secure—or at least believe that we are. We know that we failed, at horrendous cost, to protect ourselves adequately. Our bad luck. Against this reality, Canada has been offered the choice of assuring us that it is making comparable efforts to prevent terrorism or forcing us—at significant cost to both our societies—to protect against prospective terrorists in Canada. Under this essentially simple

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rubric come the gritty specifics of whether Booker Prize winner Rohinton Mistry was inspected by INS too often (when Al Gore was singled out on two consecutive days) or whether a specific hyphenated Canadian male (regardless of whether in the US illegally or having killed a US soldier in Afghanistan) is being accorded the level of legal protection that Canadian (but not US) jurisprudence might suggest.

To be sure, Governor Ridge and Deputy Prime Minister Manley are intensely focused on making a “smart” border work. But the semi-hysterical Canadian resistance to virtually every US proposal—from sky marshals to tighter refugee screening—leaves the impression that Ottawa thinks it is humoring a batty uncle who otherwise would change his inheritance provisions. Clearly, 9/11 has not convinced Canadians that they are at risk from terrorism; to reduce inconvenience to themselves, they would blithely increase the risk to us. Americans can only hope that Canadians don’t have to learn a lesson from comparable catastrophe.

*Defence.* Canadian dependence on US military protection is a fact, not a matter for debate. Nor is there any question that Canadian military capabilities have steadily deteriorated in absolute terms as well as relative to the United States. For at least a decade, senior US officials in private and in public have politely suggested that greater defence commitment would be appropriate, and Ambassador Paul Cellucci’s statements, accompanied by praise for Canadian military accomplishments in Afghanistan, have no more than echoed those of previous US ambassadors. Alternatively, Ambassador Cellucci could have stood mute and waved a collage of Canadian studies on defence far more critical than any US statement.

Thus the reaction by Defence Minister John McCallum, following President Bush’s speech prior to the Prague Summit, that Cellucci should butt out of comment on Canadian defence is inexplicable—and even less excusable than his inability to distinguish Vimy from Vichy. The president’s comment urging increased defence expenditure was generic—directed at NATO corporately; Canada was never mentioned by name. Indeed, the president’s speech was in line with America’s position on defence expenditures for a generation and hardly surprising, let alone unique. As for the suggestion that it is inappropriate for the US to urge Ottawa to support its foreign policy and increase defence expenditures, have Canadians ever hesitated for a Montreal minute to provide Washington with their views—and even their criticism? Indeed, we

would be remiss were we not to make these points (dare I say, it would be un-Canadian to be silent in this regard?)

*Potpourri.* There is a substantial range of issues on which Canadians have chosen to shove their hands into the meat grinder. These are issues in which Canadian equities at risk are nowhere near the magnitude as those of the United States and on which there is no obvious reason to “take a stand.” Read, for example, missile defence and the International Criminal Court (ICC). On missile defence, Canadians from former foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy to the Commons foreign affairs committee, seem to believe that US has no right to shield its people from missile attack. This view is even less explicable now that the Russians pose no objections. And if we are wrong in our fears that states like North Korea are untrustworthy and/or a missile system costs billions and never works, then Canadians can simply snicker at us and soak up their share of defence contracts.

Likewise, Washington has concluded that the prospective operation of the ICC will be political rather than juridical; later if not sooner. It leaves US military and civilians at risk from politicized judiciary wherein our citizens would have no recourse to US constitutional protections. We will not so risk our citizens—and there is no constituency (left or right) in the United States for joining the ICC. Canada has belaboured American unwillingness to accede to the ICC at considerable length seemingly ignoring that our citizens are far more at risk from a runaway ICC than those of other states. Indeed, Canadians seem blandly confident that its soldiers/peacekeepers could never be charged with human rights violations—presumably forgetting the airborne battalion in Somalia or the controversies stimulated by the activities of Major-General Lew MacKenzie in Serbia or Major-General Romeo d’Allaire in Rwanda.

Thus without belabouring the point excessively and in “word to the wise” fashion, Canadians should remember that, presumably to their surprise, there are many in the US government who carefully register their words and the messages and attitudes behind them. It is a brutish political reality that systematic, open disrespect by a small weak state for a large and powerful state rarely ends to the benefit of the former.

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