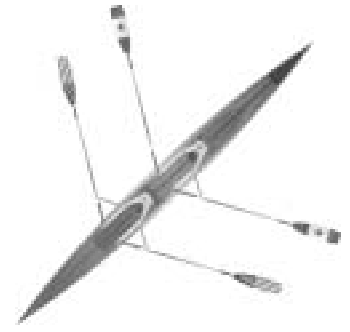
COMING TO TERMS WITH UNCLE SAM: MANAGING CANADA-US BILATERAL SECURITY AFTER SEPTEMBER 11



Pierre Martin

When can Canada just say "No" to the United States in the conduct of bilateral and multilateral security issues in the post 9/11 world? Canada enjoys both the blessing and the curse of unique proximity to the richest and most powerful nation on earth, a nation which has engaged in a war on terrorism in a way that Canada hasn't, a nation obsessed with securing its borders in a way that Canada isn't. Université de Montreal's Pierre Martin, a graduate of Chicago's Northwestern University, suggests that Canada has the problem of being rich and weak which, while better than being poor and weak, isn't the same as being rich and strong, especially when the United States is the interlocutor. Without turning its back on its preferred path of multilateralism, in the UN and NATO, Canada has to come to terms with the necessity of maintaining a productive bilateral relation with its neighbour to respond to the unique security challenges of the world after September 11.

En ce monde de l'après 11 septembre, quand le Canada pourra-t-il simplement dire « non » aux États-Unis en réponse aux questions de sécurité bilatérale et multilatérale ? Notre pays profite et pâtit tout à la fois de sa situation de voisin immédiat de la nation la plus riche et la plus puissante du monde. Une nation qui s'est engagée dans une guerre contre le terrorisme et qui est obsédée par la sécurité de ses frontières d'une manière beaucoup plus marquée que le Canada. Diplômé de la Northwestern University de Chicago et autorité reconnue sur les questions de sécurité internationale, Pierre Martin, de l'Université de Montréal, soutient que le problème du Canada est d'être à la fois riche et faible, ce qui vaut certes mieux que d'être pauvre et faible mais s'avère nettement insuffisant face à un interlocuteur de la trempe des États-Unis. Tout comme est insuffisante la voie du multilatéralisme que nous privilégions à travers l'ONU et l'OTAN pour relever les défis exceptionnels soulevés par la sécurité internationale depuis le 11 septembre.

How can a country that is extremely dependent on a superpower, both for its defence and for its economic well-being, conduct an autonomous foreign policy and stand up to the dominant partner? When examining the current bilateral relationship between Canada and the United States and the range of reactions in Canada to the newly reaffirmed US assertiveness in security affairs, I am reminded of a Japanese nationalist tract published in the late 1980s and titled "A Japan that Can Say No." In a world where the US had turned to a new assertiveness of its power in economic affairs, Japanese nationalists lamented the fact that their country so obediently followed any whim and demand of the United States. In their view, Japan simply had abandoned any sense of autonomy, and even self-respect, in literally conceding every last bit of its sovereignty to the United States. Of course, in the US, the situation tended to be perceived in a rather different light. The consensus in some circles might actually have been that it was next to impossible to make Japan take a step in the direction of American interests and priorities.

There may be a parallel between this episode in Japan-US relations and the current state of the Canada-US security relationship. Canadian nationalists might perceive their country to be entirely subservient, ready and willing to ask "How high?" whenever Uncle Sam says "Jump!" Meanwhile, in Washington, the perception of Canada's willingness to accede to US demands in the security area is somewhat less sanguine.

When the United States called for help in the immediate aftermath of the attack, answering "No" simply was not an option. Apart from issues that call for unconditional response, however, there has to be some room for disagreement. The question then becomes: What are the circumstances in which Canada can say "No"?

In general, it is better to be rich and powerful than poor and weak. Most would probably also agree that being rich

> The US is the fundamental provider of physical and material security for Canada, but the very magnitude of its military and economic power also generates a great deal of insecurity.

and weak is preferable to being poor and weak. As David Jones recently noted in *Policy Options* (March 2002), however, to be rich and weak can be an uneasy position in a dangerous world. Canada happens to be in that position. Fortunately, or perhaps in some ways unfortunately, Canada has a rich and powerful neighbour who has some degree—but by no means an unlimited amount—of tolerance for a free ride on the part of its allies. Like many other allies of the United States, Canada would not realistically be able to defend itself adequately in the event of an all-out attack on its territory by a determined and well-endowed enemy. Even in their role as an expeditionary force, the Canadian Forces can hardly aspire to make a significant difference by acting alone, outside the framework of a broader coalition. In such a position of relative dependency and weakness, what is the margin of manœuvre for a meaningful foreign policy?

Foreign policy is about the quest for physical security, material well-being and what I shall refer to, for lack of a better term, as "psychological" security. This last term includes the notion of a secure identity, a sense of purpose expressed in the promotion of values and a sense of autonomy in the conduct of one's internal and external affairs.

Observers of contemporary Canadian foreign policy will note that these concepts are very close to the so-called "three pillars" of this country's foreign policy, as identified in the 1995 Foreign Policy Review—the promotion of prosperity, the protection of security and the projection of Canadian values. More theoretically oriented readers will also note the relationship between this category of foreign policy objectives and Joseph Nye's notion of "soft power," which often refers to Canadian foreign policy as a model. The problem for Canada is that it is almost entirely dependent upon the United States for its physical security and material well-being, which tends to undermine the foundation of its "soft-power" claims, and to foster a rather tense relationship with its neighbour when it comes to anything that falls into the third category.

In short, the US is the fundamental provider of physical and material security for Canada, but the very magnitude of its military and economic power also generates a great deal of insecurity for its allies. After September 11 and the ensuing resurgence of American power and resolve, it has become even more obvious that Canada's material well-being and physical security are irremediably tied to the United States. What are the options and the range of credible choices for Canada's security policy in the foreseeable future?

At the root of any transformation in US-Canadian security relations in the wake of September 11 is a fundamental shift in the US outlook on security issues. Few historical analogies allow us to understand the extent to which the events of that fateful day awakened amongst Americans the feeling that we live in a dangerous world, and that America is no longer immune to this danger. For Canada, this new environment has direct consequences in at least five areas: continental defence; border management; the outward projection of the war on terrorism; the dormant issue of ballistic missile defence; and the continuing problem of the commitment-capability gap in Canada's international security policy.

The new attitude regarding security policy in the United States since September 11 represents an enormous constraint on the range of available choice for Canada when it comes to continental defence. In the current American mindset, the distinction between "homeland defence" and "continental defence" is almost entirely academic. The United States will do whatever it feels it must do to defend its territory, regardless of what Canada feels, wants, says or does. Framed in this way, the question of whether Canada ought to further integrate its armed forces with the Americans for the purpose of continental defence might also be, in a sense, almost entirely academic.

Last October, the United States launched NORTHCOM (Northern Command), an integrated command structure that oversees the military aspects of homeland defence and treats the North American continent as a single operational theatre. Simply put, this would mean an extension to all areas of military and naval operations of the existing level of co-operation already in place in air defence with NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defence Command, based in Colorado).

Although Canada's participation in this new command structure has, for all practical purposes, already been accepted in principle, some of the details still need to be ironed out. Nonetheless, the prospect of Canada's inclusion in NORTHCOM has provoked the ire of some Canadian nationalists, who have raised countless objections to this new plan. But the integration of forces into this new command is not a change

CP Archive

GETTING ALONG: President Bush and Prime Minister Chrétien share a lighter moment in a meeting in Detroit, September 2002.

in the nature of the military relationship, only a change in degree. Also, the Canadian military generally tend to view it in a favourable light, as it promises to clarify the rules and procedures of any co-operative action and involves, in their perception, very little, if any, loss of control to their US partners. Finally, in my own assessment, the absence of clear rules for coordinating military actions across the border in the event of a major crisis could lead to communication failures or misunderstandings that might have more serious consequences for Canadian sovereignty than the extension of current co-operation to a wider range of activities might entail.

The image of the world's longest undefended border has almost become a cliché in discussions of Canadian-American relations. Within hours after the tragic events of September 11, things had already started to change. Although it is still possible for thousands of deer and a number of smugglers to crisscross the border at any time of day or night without too much hassling from the authorities, the border has become, and is likely to remain for quite some time, a great deal less undefended than it was on September 10, 2001. The question for Canada is: How to minimize the costs of this new reality for Canadians?

This is not a minor issue. Since new controls were implemented at the border last year, the roads leading to many crossings have become virtual parking lots, making the cost of driving through US controls higher, on a bad day, than the tariffs used to be on certain goods before free trade agreements. Partial solutions to this imbroglio have been found that involve a better use of innovative technology to speed up the process, and co-operation with industry to ensure the more efficient movement of sealed containers from plant to plant. But these all are band-aid solutions that cannot entirely redress the losses to the Canadian economy due to a major slowdown in trade.

A more fundamental proposal has been to make major concessions to Canadian sovereignty and autonomy in policy making, and harmonize immigration and customs procedures with the United States, even share the task of controlling access to the continent to create a de facto common border, or a security perimeter, around northern North America. (It might eventually include Mexico, but this could raise a great deal more resistance in the United States.) This kind of proposal, which has been dubbed a "Big Idea," would not be realistic, for two main reasons.

First, if some Canadians are more than willing to trade some measure of policy autonomy and a stepped-up defence effort in return for the economic security that might result from deeper integration, they tend to overestimate the capacity of US policy makers to engage in such cross-issue linkages. The notion that Canada's willingness to accede to US security interests might soften the resistance of opponents to further market integration misrepresents the fragmented nature of the US policy environment. In fact, pressures from stronger countervailing trade interests in the US are much more likely to lead to the resolution of Canada's current trade woes on Capitol Hill than any amount of well-intentioned effort to strengthen North American security.

Second, even if the Canadian government committed itself to uphold the same standards for entry into Canada that US authorities are imposing for entry into their own territory, this would be unlikely to have much effect on the tightening of controls at the US border. This is compatible with the "unilateral impulse" that has marked the US approach to security issues, even before the terrorist attacks of last year.

The new attitude regarding security policy in the United States since September 11 represents an enormous constraint on the range of available choice for Canada when it comes to continental defence.

Indeed, even if US agents themselves took charge of controlling access to Canada, it is unlikely, in the current state of mind of the American people, that their government would surrender any legal means of monitoring the movements of "potential" terrorists.

The new reality at the Canadian border is likely to remain an irritant from Canada's perspective for a long time to come. Politicians will exploit it to reassure their nationalist supporters that they don't pander to the United States. They will also remain willing to defend Canadian values vehemently when complaining against such unfortunate practices as ethnic profiling at the US border, but this is unlikely to make the United States change its course.

As much as bilateral issues pose a challenge for Canada's sense of policy autonomy and self-identity, the issue of what position should be adopted over potential US preventive intervention in Iraq leaves ample room for redress. Indeed, the fact that this issue involves intense negotiations amongst allies and beyond allows the Canadian government to affirm its independence vis-à-vis the United States, while remaining committed to being a part of a multilateral force if deterrence is not enough to make Saddam Hussein mend his ways. As is usual in security matters, when the stakes are high it is only through multilateral forums such as the UN or NATO that Canada can exert a moderating influence on the United States. In this situation, there is little reason to assume that the policy model that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War—which led Canada to participate in some capacity in every major multilateral intervention under US leadership since the Gulf War—would not hold once more if the international community finds Iraq in clear violation of its obligations.

The issues that will present far greater challenges politically in the coming years—two problems that already marred the bilateral security agenda before September 11 and are bound to resurface sooner or later—are ballistic missile defence (BMD) and the wide and unsustainable gap that exists between Canada's security commitments and the size and strength of its armed forces.

The wide gap between Canada's security commitments and its capability to assemble, equip and transport enough troops to carry these commitments through is hardly anything new. By NATO standards, Canada has remained for many years a laggard in terms of the relative size of its military budget—just over 1 percent of GDP. In a world where danger lurks anywhere and can loom at any time, given the size of the country, and given the proportional size of the ambitions of some of its foreign-policy makers, an adequate, self-standing defence would require an unimaginable increase in military spending. Considering that even a much more onerous defence effort might still be inadequate against some ideal standard, the choice for Canada has so far turned out to be an easy one. Indeed, faced with the choice between a defence that would be costly and yet still inadequate, and one that would be inadequate but cheap, Canadian politicians have preferred the latter.

> The wide gap between Canada's security commitments and its capability to assemble, equip, and transport enough troops to carry these commitments through is hardly new. By NATO standards, Canada has remained for many years a laggard in terms of the relative size of its military budget.

The paradox is that there is, and there had been for some time even before the tragic events of September 2001, a great deal of public sympathy in Canada for a substantial injection of funds into defence. A recent Senate committee chaired by Colin Kenny even recommended a substantial increase of $4 billion, or about one-third of the current budget, even taking the unusual step of calling for a 30-month moratorium on foreign interventions to allow the Canadian Forces time to rebuild and regain their strength. Although the moratorium idea was not well received, there remains a wide consensus among parliamentarians and the public that a substantial increase in the defence budget is long overdue.

Still, an effort of that magnitude would require that political leaders be willing and able to step up to the plate and articulate why they are asking for such a commitment from taxpayers. This type of leadership, however, has been notoriously absent in recent years on the part of Canada's top political leaders. As Kim Nossal noted a few years ago, Canada has been conducting what amounts to "pinchpenny diplomacy," always willing to "talk the talk" in various international forums, but increasingly unable to "walk the walk."

The issue of ballistic missile defence had been dormant in the bilateral security relationship in the past year, but at year's end Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham signalled Canada's willingness to discuss it. But it is unlikely that the Bush administration will be in much of a mood for compromise. Although the military tend to be rather receptive to this option, and government officials studiously avoid taking a clear position on it, the public is at best lukewarm and at worst

squarely hostile to it. If the public was indifferent to calls by nationalists to resist participation in NORTHCOM, the issue of ballistic missile defence involves two very different factors: powerful symbols and high costs. Given the strong resistance to this option in public opinion and its overtones of subservience to US demands, Canadian politicians may be faced with a much harder choice on BMD than on most other areas of security policy. Moreover, if the large costs that the BMD program might entail for Canada are factored into the debate over increased funding for the military, public support for the latter could be much harder to sustain than otherwise.

In the coming years, Canada will most probably find ways to say "No" to the United States on some issues, but it is no more in its interest to relinquish its option to say "No" some of the time than it is to give its principal partner the impression that "No" is always the starting point in any bilateral negotiation.

Some have proposed to strike a more favourable balance in the bilateral relationship by entering into "strategic bargains" with the United States and establish linkages between security policy and other areas of central interest for Canada. In fact, such linkages are not a sound foundation on which Canada's relationship with its dominant neighbour should rest. If Canada is to move closer to the US position in some policy area, it should do so on the basis of that policy's intrinsic value, and not on the basis of a possible exchange for advantage in some other area.

On the whole, regardless of the level of effort deployed by Canada in the foreseeable future, it will still have the problem of being rich and weak in a dangerous world, and thus vulnerable and dependent on its dominant neighbour for both physical and material security. Finally, using the United States to leverage a sense of "psychological" security and enhance Canadian identity will no doubt continue, but entails high risk against low returns.

This was well illustrated by the episode of the "moron" remark at last November's NATO meeting in Prague, when the prime minister put his personal loyalty to a staff member ahead of a minimal sense of respect for this country's most important ally. This might have been well perceived by some Canadian nationalists, but it virtually ensured that Jean Chrétien will have no more than pro forma access to the White House during his last months in office. Indeed, when a former prime minister, Brian Mulroney, is granted privileged access to the Oval Office and then sees fit to declare that the episode "did not escape the attention" of the president, this would seem a clear sign that the next prime minister might have some patching-up to do.

Pierre Martin is associate professor of political science at the Université de Montréal and the director of the joint Université de Montréal/McGill University Research Group in International Security. This article is based on a paper delivered at the "Third Canada-Japan Symposium on Peace and Security Cooperation," held in Vancouver on November 23, 2002.

Regardless of the level of effort deployed by Canada in the foreseeable future, it will still have the problem of being rich and weak in a dangerous world.

Next month in Policy Options: Bank mergers and the public interest

The Senate banking and the Commons finance committees have been asked for recommendations on large bank mergers in Canada.

The Senate committee has already recommended mergers be permitted so long as access is maintained—access to branches for consumers and to credit for small business borrowing. The Kolber committee has also recommended that with two layers of regulatory approval, from the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, there is no need for a third level of political approval from the government.

The House committee, with hearings scheduled early in the new year, is expected to take a more skeptical view of the benefits of any mergers, and to argue for continued political oversight.

Can Canada's banks be world-competitive in a global industry while providing good service and credit to customers at home? Next month's *Policy Options* examines the big picture.