

GETTING THE EAGLE'S ATTENTION WITHOUT TWEAKING ITS BEAK



Canada-US relations are seldom as harmonious as leaders pretend nor as bad as critics would have you believe. The institutional weight of the commercial relationship and the strategic partnership on security issues are simply too important to be neglected by either country. But there have been historic ups and downs between Canada and the United States, usually starting with the relationships between prime ministers and presidents. John Noble, a former senior Canadian diplomat, Harvard University Fellow and Visiting Fulbright Fellow at Michigan State University, considers the relationship from the top down over the last 40 years and concludes that while things have been worse, it's time for Canada to mend fences with the Bush administration.

John J. Noble

Les relations canado-américaines sont rarement aussi harmonieuses que le prétendent les dirigeants politiques et rarement aussi mauvaises que l'affirment les critiques : entre nos deux pays, les questions de commerce et de sécurité ont une telle importance institutionnelle et stratégique que ni l'un ni l'autre ne peut tout simplement se permettre de les négliger. Mais d'un point de vue historique, le Canada et les États-Unis ont effectivement traversé des périodes troubles, généralement induites par les relations entre nos premiers ministres et leurs présidents. Ancien haut diplomate canadien, fellow de Harvard et fellow invité de la chaire Fulbright de la Michigan State University, John Noble propose en la matière un bilan circonstancié des 40 dernières années pour en tirer cette conclusion : les relations entre nos deux pays ont connu de pires épreuves qu'aujourd'hui, mais il est tout de même temps pour le Canada de manifester sa bonne volonté à l'égard de l'administration Bush.

Cassandras on both sides of the border have been warning of the dire consequences to Canada if we don't improve relations with the United States, while some Canadian political leaders appear tempted to try to distance themselves from the United States by resorting to a type of anti-Americanism which Pierre Trudeau once said "verges on hypocrisy," or as another distinguished Canadian politician called it, "tweaking feathers from the eagle." Canada-US relations have been in a bit of a quandary since the 2000 presidential elections during which our then ambassador to Washington, Raymond Chrétien, also nephew of the prime minister, expressed the view that Canadians favoured Al Gore over George Bush (a far more damaging comment than the one which recently cost Chrétien's press spokesperson her job).

Bush's initial moves after the election were to stress the relationship with the United States' southern neighbour, Mexico, rather than to look north to Canada (a natural response for a former governor of Texas faced with daily problems related to thousands of illegal Mexican migrants and nothing more than a few hundred snowbirds from Canada). They were quite different from Chrétien's relations

with former president Clinton, and Chrétien was slow to make the necessary adjustment. Bush also took a series of steps on international issues which caused concern in Ottawa: backing away from engagement in the Middle East peace process until it blew up on him; deciding not to ratify Kyoto (which poses problems for the world at large, but particularly for Canadian industry and our ability to continue to attract foreign investment); not only refusing to join the International Criminal Court but seeking an exemption for all Americans; refusing to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty and a convention on biological weapons. At the same time the Bush administration withdrew from the anti-ballistic missile (ABM) treaty and pursued the development of an expensive ballistic missile defence system, which many regarded as a high tech Maginot line, which will provide no defence against terrorist attacks.

Events after 9/11 took another turn. When the United States unilaterally shut down its air space and stranded thousands of its own citizens in mid-air, Canada opened its airports and Atlantic Canadians opened their homes to house these unexpected visitors. Canadians flocked to

The Americans didn't like being put on the same moral plane as the Soviets, but Trudeau did succeed in convincing Ronald Regan that his message wasn't getting through to Western publics.

Parliament Hill to demonstrate public sympathy and support for the victims of terrorism. At the same time American action along our border created huge lineups of traffic in goods and people to the point where many American companies had to shut down because they lacked essential inputs from Canada. It was as if the United States had imposed a trade embargo on itself. It took some time for the Canadian government to fully realize the implications of 9/11 and many Canadians still either don't get it or don't want to face the realities.

Canada participated in the war in Afghanistan, where, most tragically, the casualties we suffered were inflicted by "friendly fire" from an American aircraft. The Canadian government also took steps to deal with the challenge of the border, and Homeland Security Advisor Tom Ridge and Deputy Prime Minister John Manley met in December 2001 and issued a Smart Border Plan. Much of the work had been done on this long before 9/11, but there had been no political impetus on either side of the border to give it priority. September 11 changed that. But Canadians did not feel as threatened by terrorism as Americans did and this was reflected in the general attitude of the government.

The Bush administration's desire to take unilateral action against Iraq also put it in opposition to long-standing Canadian policy that the preventive action provided in the UN Charter must be collective and authorized by the Security Council. Many Canadians, including many in the government, conveniently forgot that in 1999 Canada had participated in the Kosovo War without UN authority and that our CF-18s had dropped 10 percent of the bombs there. And the Chrétien Liberals forgot that they had opposed Canadian participation in the Gulf War in 1991, even with the full support of the Security

Council. Prime Minister Chrétien, like many other leaders, counseled President Bush to seek a Security Council mandate like his father had done for the Gulf War. President Bush listened and the threatened unilateral action has not yet happened.

In late September 2002 Bush issued his National Security Strategy which contains both the unilateralist doctrine of pre-emption and a variety of actions requiring co-operation with other countries on regional and global issues. Perhaps the most telling statement for Canada is found at the beginning of Chapter VIII which is entitled "Develop Agendas for

Cooperative Action with the Other Main Centers of Global Power." It says: "There is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained co-operation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe." Such a statement has never before appeared in an American National Security Strategy and its existence has been singularly ignored by the Canadian media and commentators only too eager to take umbrage at alleged slights to Canada by the Bush administration.

Such a statement suggests that despite all the rhetoric about

unilateralism, or the allegations of the decline in Canada's influence, the Bush administration recognizes it needs others, including Canada, to help it accomplish its objectives, which often are objectives shared by Canada and other countries. Where we differ sometimes is on the means to achieve the objectives. But it does provide legitimacy to continued Canadian dialogue with the United States on a wide variety of issues.

Canada-US relations since the 1950's have been a sort of roller coaster ride. There have been highs and lows, but we haven't ever come off the tracks. John Diefenbaker blamed his 1963 electoral defeat on American intervention and there was an element of truth to it. Diefenbaker's refusal to arm the Bomarc anti-aircraft missiles



CP Picture Archive
BETTER DAYS: President Ronald Reagan gets a red carpet welcome from Prime Minister Brian Mulroney as Air Force One lands at Quebec City for the Shamrock Summit, March 17, 1985.

with nuclear weapons brought about the disintegration of his minority government in 1963, aided by critical comments from Washington. Diefenbaker's attempt to diversify trade away from the United States towards Britain was unsuccessful, but his policy of refusing to accept the American trade embargo on Cuba is one that has been followed by all of his successors.

Lester Pearson reversed his party's stand on nuclear weapons, and campaigned in the 1963 election on the need to respect undertakings with the US. A future prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, labeled Pearson "the de-frocked Prince of Peace" for this nuclear policy reversal. Pearson's relations with Kennedy were much better, but of short duration. Pearson's relations with Lyndon Johnson were up and down. The Vietnam War and Canada's acceptance of American draft dodgers, while at the same time allowing Canadian companies to supply the American military with equipment for the war, represented a delicate balancing act. Pearson and Johnson signed the Auto Pact and the Defence Production Sharing Act in 1965. Pearson crossed Johnson when he urged a bombing pause in Vietnam during a 1967 speech to an American audience in Philadelphia. Johnson took this as a personal affront and physically manhandled Pearson when they next met. Pearson's foreign minister, Paul Martin Sr., had a unique relationship with secretary of state Dean Rusk. Rusk said he always asked Martin for his views first, since if he spoke first, Martin would inevitably differ for the sake of being different. We can only hope that the next Paul Martin will not follow in his father's footsteps on this issue.

Pierre Trudeau faced five American presidents during his tenure: Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan. Johnson had already decided not to seek re-election when Trudeau assumed office. Relations with Nixon were frosty and the Nixon tapes reveal he used pithy language to describe Trudeau. Nixon was perhaps jealous that Trudeau had beaten him to the mark in recognizing Communist China first. More importantly, Nixon's 1971 unilateral abrogation of the Bretton Woods agreement on fixed exchange rates and the imposition of an across the board 10 percent surcharge on all imports into the US posed real problems for Canada. Nixon thought Japan was the United States' largest trading partner and he came within a few minutes of tearing up the Auto Pact. This announcement was on the last page of the press release abrogating the Bretton Woods

Agreement and it was only an astute secretary of state who convinced the White House to rip it off before the communiqué was released. Trudeau's Third Option was therefore in direct response to American action, not designed to provoke the Americans. Trudeau agreed to send Canadian observers to Vietnam as part of Kissinger's peace accord. Canada was not invited to the first Economic Summit in Rambouillet, France by President Giscard d'Estaing in 1975. However, President Ford invited Trudeau to attend the 1976 Summit in Puerto Rico and Canada has been member of the G7, now G8, ever since. Carter never visited Ottawa, but relations with Trudeau were mainly cordial and Trudeau was invited to address the US Congress.

Joe Clark's minority government lasted only nine months. He accepted Carter's call for a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics and joined the American embargo against selling more wheat to the Soviet Union. Trudeau did not reverse the Canadian boycott of the Moscow Olympics when he regained power.

Trudeau and Reagan were philosophically miles apart, but their personal relationship was never as frosty as portrayed in the media. They constantly tried to one-up each other with their jokes and Trudeau agreed to test the air-launched cruise missile in Canada in 1983 despite polls that showed a majority of Canadians were opposed. In the run-up to that decision, Trudeau issued an open letter to Canadians in which he said that "the knee-jerk anti-Americanism of some Canadians verges on hypocrisy." At the 1983 G7 Summit in Williamsburg, Trudeau told the other leaders that "we should be busting our asses for peace." Margaret Thatcher turned to him and said "Pierre, you are such a comfort to the Kremlin." Thus was launched the Trudeau peace initiative which received pot shots from Pentagon "pipsqueaks" (actually a high ranking State Department official). The Americans didn't like being put on the same moral plane as the Soviets, but Trudeau did succeed in convincing Ronald Reagan that his message wasn't getting through to Western publics. Reagan listened and later told both the Japanese and Irish parliaments that a nuclear war can never be won and therefore should never be fought. Trudeau initiated the practice of quarterly meetings between the Canadian and American foreign ministers to try to resolve some of the many disputes.

John Turner wanted to refurbish relations with the United States. That was the message that his

Jean Chrétien made much of the fact that he did not believe that fishing with the president of the United States was the way to conduct the relationship. He decided that it could be done better on the golf course.

The public perception of Chrétien's relations with President George W. Bush is similar to that between Trudeau and Ronald Reagan, in part because Chrétien believes that is the way Canadians want it.

foreign minister, Jean Chrétien, gave to George Shultz when they met in July 1984. Chrétien also told Shultz that unlike Trudeau he did not have to win every argument, but he then proceeded to give a complex explanation and justification of the NEP, which left Shultz more than slightly perplexed.

Before his election in 1984 in Brian Mulroney promised to give the United States “the benefit of the doubt” on some issues like the American invasion of Grenada. Prime Minister Mulroney made refurbishing relations with the US his top priority and set a positive tone in Washington. Mulroney abolished FIRA and the NEP, declared Canada “open for business” again, increased defence spending, and launched the negotiation of a bilateral free trade agreement.

Mulroney's personal relations with President Reagan were excellent, but this didn't stop the Americans from challenging Canada's claims to sovereignty over our Arctic waters or imposing heavy duties on softwood lumber. Mulroney refused to take “no” for an answer on acid rain and extracted a commitment from Ronald Reagan on Arctic sovereignty (“let's put sovereignty aside, we won't do anything up there without your permission),” which proved to be the basis of the eventual agreement. Mulroney said “no” to Reagan's invitation to participate in the Strategic Defence Initiative (“Star Wars”) and his government took differing stances with respect to Central America, Ethiopia and South Africa. The negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement was a turning point in Canada-US relations as was the 1988 federal election on free trade which gave Mulroney a mandate to ratify the agreement. Mulroney also delayed replying to an American request to test the advanced (stealth) cruise missile for over eighteen months and at least until after the 1988 federal election. The eventual agreement was announced during President Bush's first visit to Ottawa in January 1989. Mulroney's increased spending on defence came at the onset of the end of the Cold War and his proposal to acquire nuclear submarines ran into considerable opposition from the US Navy, which worried Canada could not afford them. Mulroney got the Navy's objections overruled, but abandoned the project as well as a super icebreaker because of costs. Mulroney's government had cultivated relations with Vice-President Bush, who came to Canada on at least two occasions for meetings on acid rain and Arctic sovereignty.

Mulroney had excellent relations with Bush, who valued his advice. At the 1989 NATO



CP Archive

GOLFING BUDDIES: Jean Chrétien and Bill Clinton golfing at Mont-Tremblant in 1999.

Summit, Bush faced a thorny dispute with many European allies over the need to negotiate reductions in short-range nuclear weapons (SNF). Mulroney had engaged Bush on this issue prior to the Summit and left him some ideas during his visit to Washington in May to open the new Canadian embassy. At the Summit the debate was intense. At one point Mulroney looked across the table to Bush and reminded him, in the words of US Supreme Court Justice Learned Hand, that “leadership to be effective has to take into account the views of others.” Bush listened then and on many other occasions. Mulroney advised Bush to obtain a UN Security Council mandate to act against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Bush did and got the Council's full support, including Canada's. Mulroney also advised Bush how best to get French President Mitterrand on board.

Mulroney's personal relationship with George Bush is documented in Bush's memoirs. Bush referred to it again recently at the NAFTA at 10 Conference in Washington in December 2002 and said that when you trust someone else's judgment you are more likely to listen to what they are saying. Early assessments of Mulroney's conduct of relations with the United States were less than favourable (e.g., Lawrence Martin's “Pledge of Allegiance” and Marcy Macdonald's “Star Spangled Banner”). Martin's book used mainly

American sources and contrary to his earlier book, *Presidents and Prime Ministers*, was very unbalanced. Macdonald's was a sheer diatribe. These books were written before any meaningful assessment of the impact of the FTA and NAFTA could be made. A more recent and balanced assessment, *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy 1984-93*, by Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal, appeared in 2001.

Jean Chrétien criticized Mulroney for being too close to the United States. Chrétien made much of the fact that he did not believe that fishing with the president of the United States was the way to conduct the relationship. He decided that it could be done better on the golf course. His golf games with President Clinton became legendary. The number of Secret Service agents deployed in the rough and the frogmen in the water hazards ensured that no ball would ever be lost. Chrétien established cordial relations with Clinton and early on they both had to find wiggle room out of the election commitments they had made on NAFTA. Clinton came to Chrétien's aid at the 1999 Conference on Federalism at Mont Tremblant. Premier Lucien Bouchard had made a blistering speech in praise of separatism, aimed not at the conferees but at his own electorate. President Clinton made a more persuasive defence of federalism at the end of the conference, in a forty-five minute speech without notes. Bouchard, who had been first on his feet to welcome Clinton, was crestfallen. The president of the United States had dared to question his separatist agenda in Quebec. Clinton and Chrétien retired to the golf course to celebrate.

The public perception of Chrétien's relations with President George W. Bush is similar to that between Trudeau and Ronald Reagan, in part because Chrétien believes that is the way Canadians want it, rather than the perception of being too close. Perceptions often matter more than realities and the current perception is that the relationship has strayed too far.

Canadians have to deal with whoever is in power in Washington and have to avoid expressing any preferences. Lloyd Axworthy decided that bilateral relationships, not just with the United States, didn't matter as much as multilateral relationships. In reality the two go hand in hand and can be mutually reinforcing. Bilateral relations with the United States cannot be ignored or neglected. Several of Axworthy's initiatives were seen as being anti-American, when

in fact they were aimed at addressing world problems. The fact that the United States opposed them (banning land mines and the International Criminal Court) speaks more about a lack of American leadership on those issues than anything else.

Canadians have been shocked that they are not exempt from the American reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Things we have taken for granted like easy access across our border are no longer assured. The massive reorganization of the US government and the creation of the Homeland Security Department pose more challenges for Canada than for any other country because we have the longest border with the United States. Americans don't worry about Canadians attacking them, but they do worry very much about other people that Canada allows in from elsewhere. Canada has the most generous system for handling refugee claimants who turn up on our doorstep rather than being processed abroad. This has given rise to widespread abuse of the system with many of the claimants actually being queue jumpers rather than genuine refugees. The American fear is that the Canadian system is so lax that would-be terrorists will avail themselves of it to gain access to Canada and then slip into the United States. As one experienced former US Customs official has said, the "Canada-US border may have 15 or so smart lanes, but the remaining 4,000 miles is the forest primeval."

Canada has made some efforts to tighten up its refugee system, especially with respect to many of the 70 percent of claimants who arrive from the US (the safe third country agreement with the US only covers people who cross by land at recognized border points and not those arriving by air or illegally across the border). There are still 30 percent of refugee claimants who arrive from abroad, mainly from Europe, and we need similar safe third country agreements with Western European countries. We also need a better system of controlling people-issued visitor visas. Tightening up our procedures doesn't mean we have to take fewer refugees. It means we have to take fewer people at our borders and increase the numbers who are interviewed and pre-screened abroad.

For many years Canada has been exempt from the strict export controls of the United States because we maintained comparable control mechanisms in Canada to ensure that goods on the US export control list did not leak abroad from Canada. Otherwise, Canadian industry

Canada has the most generous system for handling refugee claimants who turn up on our doorstep. The American fear is that the Canadian system is so lax that would-be terrorists will avail themselves of it to gain access to Canada and then slip into the United States.

If we aren't prepared to implement policies on our external borders to satisfy United States concerns, they will implement them on our common border. We have a choice: exercise our sovereignty in a manner that protects Canadian interests, or refuse to co-operate with the US.

would suffer. We now face the same principle, only in reverse, with respect to high-risk people and goods coming into Canada and then leaking into the United States. If we aren't prepared to implement policies on our external borders to satisfy United States concerns, they will implement them on our common border. We have a choice: exercise our sovereignty in a manner that protects Canadian economic interests; or refuse to co-operate with the United States, in the name of some kind of sacrosanct and abstract sovereignty, and thereby jeopardize our economic interests.

Canada has participated in a joint command over North American air space since the 1950s (NORAD), which now includes aerospace. A Canadian general was in command of NORAD at the time of the 9/11 attacks. Critics who suggest that the recently announced joint planning group to coordinate actions against terrorist activities infringes on Canadian sovereignty forget that we have had NORAD for almost 50 years. Contrary to some claims, the United States never asked Canada to participate in its homeland security Northern Command.

As the events just after 9/11 showed, the uncertainties of our common border with the United States pose real threats to Canada's economic security. The threat is not just to our continued assured access to American markets. Our share of direct foreign investment (FDI) from outside North America is also threatened. I spent much time in Europe trying to lure potential investors to Canada with KPMG studies showing that our Greenfield costs were lower and our quality of life higher than in the United States. But the World Economic Forum's and the Institute for Management Development's annual world competitiveness surveys always put the United States in first place, considerably ahead of all the others countries. Canada usually places within the top ten, but well behind the US.

Former prime minister Mulroney made this point at the recent NAFTA at 10 Conference in Washington when he said "our internal borders will only be smart if our external perimeter is secure....We must make our internal borders work in our shared interest rather than succumbing to the false temptation of sealing them off against each other to protect security." The last thing in the world we want is for the new Homeland Security Department to spend a good portion of its budget to protect the United States from Canadians.

Claims that this will inevitably lead to political integration are arrant nonsense. Canadians have no interest in a political union, but deeper economic integration as a result of NAFTA is a reality which cannot be ignored. Several think tanks and the Commons Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade have issued reports recommending the need to go beyond NAFTA and to create a perimeter for both security and economic purposes around our two countries and eventually Mexico. There will also have to be some institutional arrangements.

The nature of Canada's relations with the United States and the security of our access to American markets is a far more serious and pressing issue than the future of our Medicare system. Without continued secured access to the American market, we won't generate the wealth necessary to pay for Medicare or anything else, nor be able to exercise our sovereignty in its truest sense.

And without a strong relationship at the top, we can't expect to play the strong role in foreign affairs that many Canadians want or to have our views taken seriously in Washington. There is still time for the Chrétien Government to address these issues with the degree of urgency which they merit, and to tackle them in the comprehensive manner which is required, rather than simply seeking the step-by-step incrementalist approach. Another terrorist attack aimed at the United States could have enormous negative consequences for Canada's economy. This doesn't mean we can't have disputes with the United States, but we need to reprioritize our relationship and focus on the things that matter most to us. John Manley and Bill Graham have made some encouraging noises. They need to be followed up at the centre with a truly strategic approach. As Brian Mulroney showed, making relations with the United States your top foreign policy priority can only be beneficial for Canada, even to the extent we disagree with the Americans.

John J. Noble is a former Canadian diplomat who served as ambassador to Greece, Switzerland and Liechtenstein and minister/deputy chief of mission to France. He has extensive experience on Canada/US relations and is a Fellow of Harvard University's Center for International Affairs and Visiting Fulbright Fellow at the Centre for Canadian Studies at Michigan State University.