

A TIME FOR COURAGE AND CONVICTION IN FOREIGN POLICY

Derek H. Burney

A former Canadian ambassador to the United States suggests it's time for a reality check in any review of Canadian foreign policy, where Canada's words speak louder than its actions. Derek Burney writes that a growing number of nations in the global community "have learned that Canada, more often than not, can be counted on to provide 'all aid short of help' and 'all help short of aid.'" He adds that for the last decade Canada has distanced itself from Washington while promoting Canadian values, "as if that were a virtue in itself." But, instead, he writes, "it has contributed to neglect of our most vital interests and a decline of relevance and respect for Canada and the views of Canada where we have the greatest scope and potential for influence."

Ancien ambassadeur du Canada aux États-Unis, Derek Burney soutient qu'il est temps de revoir notre politique étrangère en confrontant à la réalité un discours qui nous tient lieu d'action. Un nombre grandissant de pays ont ainsi appris qu'ils doivent le plus souvent se contenter des belles intentions du Canada, sans trop espérer que ses paroles seront suivies d'effets. Ces dix dernières années, ajoute-t-il, notre pays s'est distancé de Washington en mettant de l'avant des valeurs canadiennes présentées « comme des vertus en soi ». Une attitude qui nous aurait fait perdre de vue nos intérêts vitaux, tout en érodant la pertinence de nos prises de position et le respect suscité par notre pays dans les domaines où il pourrait justement exercer une réelle influence.



Why is it that Canadian governments perennially seek to review or study our foreign policy rather than articulate or lead with a vision of their own? After all, we have a Department of Foreign Affairs, not to mention a full minister, several sub-ministers and, of course, a prime minister who should have more than a passing interest in defining and directing the main lines of Canadian foreign policy. Is the compass elusive or the conviction lacking? Or is it because we prefer a role in world affairs that is long on sentiment but short on substance and where we confuse attendance with purpose and travel with involvement.

There is, in fact, more myth than fact about what we claim to be doing and how we are perceived on the world stage. Our participation in G7 or G8 summitry creates for Canadians the illusion of influence in deliberations at the highest council in world affairs. We participate in virtually all international organizations and pronounce a clear preference for multilateralism as if it were an end in itself. We make solemn international commitments to reduce our per capita greenhouse gas emissions while avoiding explanations of

actions and costs required by Canadians to meet our obligations for "greenpeace in our time." Our rhetorical commitment to the developing world rings hollow against the actual amount of our assistance, which ranks Canada among the lowest at the developed-world table. We still speak with pride about a peacekeeping role even as we systematically deplete the capacity and capability of our armed forces to perform much more than token roles. The actual results of Canada's foreign policy activity (and the lack of resources allocated to our role) speak louder than words to a growing number of nations in the global community. They have learned that Canada, more often than not, can be counted on to provide "all aid short of help" and "all help short of aid."

A main reason for this ambivalence in world affairs is that our proximity to the United States gives us both a huge market for our goods and services and a safe security blanket. This helps meet two fundamental goals of foreign policy, even without much effort or direction from government. For the past decade, we have

maintained what some describe as a safe distance from Washington in the belief that this correctly reflected distinct Canadian “values” and as if that were a virtue in and of itself. Instead, it has contributed to neglect of our most vital interests and a decline of relevance and respect for Canada and the views of Canada where we have the greatest scope and potential for influence.

Canadians deserve an honest assessment and assertion of where and how best our interests and values can be promoted and defended in the world. Leaders should lead and articulate prescriptions for foreign policy that will command support at home and generate influence and respect abroad. The fundamental test should be effectiveness — doing, not looking good; making progress by moving the real (what we are and what the world is) to the ideal (improving peace and prosperity) in a complex, often dangerous world.

As John Manley observed during his brief stint as our foreign minister, an effective foreign policy for Canada must begin with a “more mature approach” to the management of relations with our neighbour and largest customer, the United States, still the world’s most dynamic society and sole hyperpower. Neglect, which is the reality of “distance,” should not be an option. We need to engage the Americans systematically and, at times, forcefully, to ensure that our vital interests are not adversely affected and that our views on world affairs register. When supported by tangible commitments those views will have effect. The fact is that if we are not managing our most important relationship properly, we are unlikely to gain much respect or influence in the world at large.

The world understands that American national security now

trumps international trade. No nation is more affected by this than Canada. The resulting border delays, coupled with a dramatic drop in the foreign exchange value of the American dollar, is adding new levels of risk for Canadian-based manufacturers in a world of just-in-time supply where time is money and intra-firm trade follows investment. If we genuinely want a “smart border” that facilitates a freer, yet more secure, flow of goods and services within the integrated North American market and mitigates the impact of border risk on future investment in Canada, we need more than an incremental approach. Specifically, Canada should develop an action plan that significantly reduces regulatory differences and streamlines procedures for customs, immigration and other aspects of border administration. We also need to strengthen the joint North American

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perimeter with increased cooperation among defence, police and intelligence agencies in order to bolster American confidence in our readiness to address their number one priority — homeland security. This will mean a new level of cooperation and require a high level of political engagement to renew trust, confidence and respect.

Continued vacillation on the issue of ballistic missile defence has left the debate in Canada primarily to advocacy groups, many of whom have simplistic, knee-jerk reactions to any and all emanations from the current US adminis-

tration. The Americans are determined to proceed whether Canada participates or not. We *do* have a choice. We can continue to participate as a partner in the defence of North America, or we can stand down on principle. Either way, our government should exercise the courage of its convictions and its responsibility as the ultimate guarantor of security for Canadians. There is no honour or principle in procrastination.

Constructive engagement with the United States does not mean “going along to get along.” When we have different interests at stake, we should not hesitate to express a different point of view. Provided our views represent more than adolescent anti-Americanism, reflect areas in which Canada is making its own contribution, and take into account not just Canadian, but perceived American interests, they will get a fair hearing.

Let us at least recognize that by keeping a “safe distance,” by standing apart, we are abandoning one of Canada’s core foreign policy objectives — to mitigate American tendencies to unilateralism and to keep the United States constructively engaged in the most effective instruments of multilateralism, notably the World Trade Organization.

One area that is ripe for increased bilateral co-operation is the inter-related realm of energy and environmental policy. Canada has now signed the Kyoto Accord. One could say we have “gone along to get along,” accepting the



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Prime Minister Martin and President Bush in Halifax at the conclusion of the US president's visit to Canada on December 1. In recent years, writes Derek Burney, Canada has distanced itself from the United States, "as if that were a virtue in itself."

challenge to substantially reduce our *per capita* greenhouse gas emissions in the near term, despite emissions on a *per square kilometer* basis that are a fraction of those emitted in Europe and elsewhere. The United States has declined to make similar short-term commitments, preferring to implement its own longer-term, technology-based approach to global warming. Climate change is a science in its infancy — one of those subjects where "the more we know, the more we know the less we know," particularly the impact of ocean currents and the countervailing cooling effect of water vapor and increased cloud formation. We *do* know that a key piece of the puzzle lies in

the commercialization of clean technologies and alternative fuels, where, not surprisingly, those "recalcitrant" Americans and the Japanese have taken the lead.

We know that a meaningful reduction in greenhouse gas emissions during the 21st century depends on the active participation of the United States, India and most importantly, China, which will surpass the US as the largest emitter in the next decade and which, at current growth rates, will be producing a level of carbon dioxide in 2050 projected to be some *eight* times greater than the current level produced by the entire industrialized world! We

also know that oil will continue to be *the* key fuel for decades to come, with the dependence of the world on Middle Eastern oil destined to make that volatile region one of continuing strategic interest and tension to all.

As an exporter of oil, natural gas and electricity, Canada is already the number one energy supplier to the United States, if not of light crude. The August 2003 blackout throughout the Northeastern US and Ontario was a stark reminder of our energy interdependence, the need for higher grid standards and our vulnerability to network disruption.

Canada possess enormous reserves in our oil sands, with technologies now

available that produce *lower* greenhouse gas emissions relative to a comparable unit of offshore oil. Natural gas from the North is also a cleaner fuel, as would be the electricity generated by potential new hydro projects on Manitoba's Nelson River or Labrador's Lower Churchill. Surely we should be working closely with our American ally to enhance our collective energy security and lessen North America's reliance on offshore oil in ways that advance our ability to lower greenhouse gas emissions in the longer run.

Canada's foreign policy *begins* with the United States, but it does not end there. Asia is a region for special emphasis by Canada. With the global economy now driven increasingly by American consumption and Chinese production, the case for a concerted strategy vis-à-vis China, where we have fallen behind a country two-thirds our size — Australia — needs no embellishment. So too, we should renew our efforts with Japan, a country that in many ways is becoming to China as we are to the United States. These are not challenges exclusive to government. The private sector should seek more creatively to exploit opportunities with China and Japan and with the dynamic Asian region as a whole. Team Canada junkets are no substitute for systematic effort and analysis aimed at broadening both the economic and the political fabric of our relations with countries and a region that will play a central role in global affairs throughout the 21st century.

Our own Western Hemisphere also merits more than rhetorical pronouncements and spasmodic trade missions. Again, we need a selective but concerted plan of action, giving particular attention to specific countries or groups of countries with whom we have tangible interests and shared values. The Caribbean should also be a higher priority for our development assistance, particularly if we have the maturity to wean ourselves away from what might best be described as a pseudo-colonial commitment to the Commonwealth and Francophonie. Indeed, the course of reform

in CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency) and our foreign aid program is clear — greater concentration on fewer countries where we can make the most difference.

A similar dose of realism should be advanced toward Europe, a region where Canada's activity, i.e. visits and representation, are well ahead of any rational calculation of our interests and where the process of internal integration should prompt more cohesive representation. Domestic political considerations may oblige us to retain our existing diplomatic presence in these regions but, if resource allocation reflected results, there would be scope for some pruning. Our major missions in London and Paris operate increasingly as glorified travel agencies meeting, greeting, wining and dining an excessive flow of dignitaries from Ottawa and the provinces. Nostalgia has never been much of a commodity in foreign policy. As well, if we genuinely believe our "northern identity" gives us common ground with northern Europeans beyond geographic or climatic similarities, we should define a strategy and a plan of substantive action that involves more than symbolic, high-level visits.

In summary, we need more focus, more rigour and less pretense in what we do and what we say we will do in terms of foreign policy.

And, despite the renewed trend toward "asymmetrical federalism," let us not sub-contract Canada's foreign policy unless we wish to marginalize Canada even more than is already the case. There is no need for the federal government to share its clear responsibility for the formulation of Canadian foreign policy if the government has a clear idea of what it wants to achieve and why.

Good government that optimizes Canada's potential requires *coordinated* foreign and domestic policies — the former focused on the creation of opportunities and acceptance of obligations, the latter on enhancing our capacity to seize those opportunities and meet our responsibilities.

Foreign policies in turn should reflect a coordinated and coherent approach to diplomacy, development and security. Key to Canada making a difference in the world, therefore, is the development of a relevant strategy and structure for the Canadian Forces, with a concurrent commitment of necessary resources. We can determine the defence budget and refine the size and role of our Forces to fit the envelope. Or we can determine Canada's military strategy and reshape the defence budget. What we can no longer do is design a "something for everyone" strategy, subsequently funded with insufficient resources, that will condemn the Canadian Forces to be "jacks of all missions and masters of none." What we must also do is shift scarce resources from "head office" to the field, with fewer departmental bureaucrats in Ottawa and more, well-trained and well-equipped troops on the ground.

The development of an effective foreign (and defence) policy rests first with an honest appraisal of what we are, as well as what we may like to be; and, second, the political courage to drive change, reallocate resources and implement identified reforms — in short, to lead. The Australian government is doing precisely that, in part because it does not have the crutch of geographic convenience which allows Canada to bob and drift in the complacent belief that the fundamentals will be preserved for us — "whether we like it or not." Let us hope that, in the coming review of Canadian foreign policy and its subsequent execution, the government of Canada will show both the courage and the convictions to make a real difference.

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