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Canada-United States
Security Relations
Outside North America**

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THE "AWAY GAME":
Canada-United States Security Relations Outside North America¹

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Conspicuous By Its Absence

Last year Canada unexpectedly entered the "reality" of public discourse on United States foreign policy. But it was not for anything found on a map of North America. If Americans today know anything about Canada, they know that in March 2003 the Government of Canada did not feel it had to support the U.S. in the War in Iraq. It is not that Canadian participation in this war would have had an impact on its outcome or yielded Ottawa any influence over its conduct the subsequent rebuilding of the country. Canada would have been inconspicuous by its presence. It was however conspicuous by its absence, and this profoundly strained bilateral relations.

According to published reports, the Senior Canadian military leadership, working with U.S. Central Command planned for and told the Americans that Canada could contribute a battle group of 600-800 troops. Then the government abruptly changed its mind and decided to send a force to Afghanistan.² The Prime Minister, it appears, was reacting to the strident rhetoric from the President Bush who began to openly speak of "regime change" even while the United Nations inspectors continued their hunt for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and to public opinion in Canada, which was against the war.

That Canada, with personnel on exchange in U.S. and U.K. forces in Iraq, ships in the Persian Gulf

¹ Parts of this paper are drawn from "The Power of Values or the Value of Power? America and Europe in post 9/11 World " *Columbia International Affairs on Line –Case Studies*, August 2003, www.ciaonet.org, "Between Venus and Mars: Canada and the Trans-Atlantic Gap," forthcoming, *Connections* 2003. "A Hard Bilateral 'Moment of Truth'", in *Independence in an Age of Empire: Assessing Unilateralism*

and Multilateralism" edited by Graham F. Walker. (Halifax: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies February 2004) Earlier versions were also presented as papers at the Atlantic Council of Canada Spring Conference, Toronto, 21 May 2003 and Conference on "Canada and the Globalizing World," Seventh Biennial Conference, Russian Association of Canadian Studies, Institute of the USA and Canada, Moscow, 25-27 June 2003.

² Chris Wattie, "Ottawa offered to join Iraq War: Proposal to U.S. to send 600-800 soldiers dropped suddenly in favour of Afghan plan," *National Post*, 27 November 2003, <http://www.nationalpost.com/.../story.html?id=8034904-3469-4B66-962E-9D3D5607EBD>.

and aircraft in the region, actually had a larger commitment to Operation Iraqi freedom made little differences in the play of events. President Bush cancelled his long planned visit to Canada where he was to address Parliament. Instead of visiting Canada, Mr. Bush hosted the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Howard, whose country had contributed troops to the war, his ranch in Texas. Washington made no secret that it was looking forward to 'regime change' in Ottawa.

Some in Canada contended that the Prime Minister deserved these snubs. Our closest ally, who had been so terribly attacked less than two years before had asked for Canada's help and support and in return received months of official obfuscation punctuated by nasty and insulting remarks questioning the President's intellectual ability from senior civil servants and back-benchers. Others simply argued that their country should have given the United States its support for the Second Gulf War if only for the sake of maintaining good bilateral relations and avoiding the wrath of the present US administration.³

But worst than being criticized, Canada was being ignored. This, according to the critics, was just the latest and saddest chapter in a pattern of behaviour that had reduced Canada, under M. Chrétien, to international irrelevancy and that had needlessly strained relations, especially in the area of security, with the United States. Major and significant efforts made by Canada realm of homeland security since 11 September 2001, could not and did not reverse this trend that the events of the Iraq war brought to the fore.

The Chrétien Legacy: Global Activism at America's Side

The decision not to participate in the Iraq war was all the more surprising because it stood in stark contrast to the behaviour of the Chrétien government, both before and after September 11, 2001. It was, moreover, largely at odds with the traditional Canadian approach to important world events and crises. Since 1945, internationalism has been a central tenet of Canadian foreign policy. Under the banner of collective security at the UN and more importantly as part of the NATO's collective defence arrangements, Ottawa participated actively in global security affairs, including sending forces overseas. When it came to determining the size of a Canadian contribution, however, this realism had a particularly Canadian flavour. Except in times of world war Canada's political leadership has

answered the question "How much is enough" by posing another question, "How much is just enough?"

In this wholly realistic assessment, Canadian leaders have proven extremely adept at matching the limited real political benefits of defence spending with limited contributions—particularly when it comes to overseas operations. This approach has "guaranteed that Canada will always prefer to undertake less of an effort than its great-power partners want it to, but not so little as to be eliminated altogether from their strategic decision."⁴

The popular view is that Canada abandoned its traditions of internationalism both in the realm of collective security and collective defence at the end of the Cold War. But this is simply not true. On the contrary, these years witnessed an active, indeed hyperactive, Canadian involvement in global affairs. If anything, Ottawa, especially when it came to use of the armed forces, was over-committed given its real interests. Truth be told, Canada was engaged at a level and scope of activity that Pearson, that consummate realist, would have shunned, dispatching forces to most of the hot spots in the new disorderly world order, beginning with the First Gulf War and continuing to places such as Bosnia, Haiti, East Timor and Kosovo. At the end of the decade, the CF had almost as many personnel in Europe as it had when the Cold War ended. More importantly, unlike the previous forty years, the CF has been involved in actual military operations, increasingly as the decade wore on, under NATO. Not surprisingly, therefore, being able to operate with its NATO allies, especially the U.S., became the focal point of military planning in the 1990s.

On 9/11, Canadian aircraft took the skies under the NORAD. Canadian ships were dispatched to the Arabian Sea and troops to Afghanistan. Today more than 2,000 Canadian troops are in Afghanistan with air transport and naval presence in the region. This is in addition to maintaining troops in the Balkans. And all of this is out of an army of less than twenty thousand and a navy with sixteen warships.⁵

³ See J.L. Granatstein, *The Importance of Being Less Than Earnest: Promoting Canada's National Interests through Tighter Ties with the U.S.* Benefactors Lecture, 2003 (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 21 October, 2003).

⁴ David Haglund and Stéphane Roussel, "The Contradictions of Canadian Strategic Culture: 'Imperial' Commitments within a 'Democratic Alliance'" paper presented to the Biennial Meeting of the American Association of Canadian Studies, Portland Oregon, November 2002, p.14.

⁵ Bruce Cheadle, "Withdrawal from Bosnia set for 2004," *The Globe and Mail*, 9 October 2003

Nonetheless, Canada remains inconspicuous in this new world order. Many Canadian analysts believe that Ottawa must spend more on defence to enhance Canada's standing in the world and convince Washington that America's security future does include Canada. Participation in overseas operations, mainly led by the United States, places the greatest demand on Canadian defence expenditures. Although in recent years Canada has cooperated with the United States militarily abroad in ways not seen even during the Cold War and its forces have performed well, there is no doubt that Canada needs to spend more on its armed forces. The government seems to have been pressing the "how much is just enough" approach beyond what the Canadian forces could bear and the Americans would accept.

The record suggests, however, that allocating more national wealth to the CF, especially for U.S.-led multinational operations overseas, will not necessarily yield Ottawa the kind of standing and influence which many are convinced will be achieved.

Home and Away

In the weeks leading up to the Iraq war, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien acted "straight from the heart," and many on both sides of the border shot verbal barbs and abuse straight from the hip. Both governments behaved badly and bilateral security relations suffered for it. The incident showed what can happen when Washington openly asks Ottawa to do something as litmus test of Canadian loyalty to America and Ottawa portrays the request as a litmus test of Canadian sovereignty. But for as the smaller, dependent power in the security relationship, the impact upon Canada was greater and an important lesson should have learned.

The new Martin government has moved to repair ties with the U.S. and made bilateral security relations a key component of foreign and defence policy. In this regard, it has indicated that will be the case even though health care and education will continue to dominate the public policy agenda and the budget. And this is as it must be, for if it was every really true in the past that "Canada's defence problem is that it has no defence problem," it is no longer the so after 11 September 2001. In truth, Canada's defence problem is convincing Washington that Canada is not an American defence problem.⁶

⁶ See, Desmond Morton, *Understanding Canadian Defence* (Toronto: Penguin/McGill Institute, 2003), pp. 3,24.

The problem has always been finding the appropriate means to assure the U.S. that Canada is neither a security risk or strategically irrelevant. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming public review and discussion of defence policy will not, as it has in past, become a sterile debate between those on the left who feel that Canada should do nothing to assist the U.S. and those on the right who believe that without enormous increases in defence spending it can do nothing. Canada has a good deal to offer the U.S. in terms of security cooperation, both at home and abroad, and it should do so.

To be sure, bilateral relations with Canada will not be the "furnace" where America's future will be forged. Even in the war on terrorism Canada will remain, as Christopher Sands recently observed, a "minor ally."⁷ But Canada needs to do more, including spending more on defence for the sake of its relations with the United States. As one experts argues:

The decline in the capabilities of the Canadian Forces threatens the current U.S.-Canadian defense relationship for the most elementary of reasons: The less Canadian military there is and the less capability it has, the less military cooperation there can be with the United States (and other allies). Yet Canadian help and cooperation looks more important to the United States than it did before September 11, as it is clear that a threat to the United States can come from across or from Canadian land, air and sea space.⁸

Canada should be prepared to support and contribute to American-led multilateral operations in the war on terrorism. It should not do so on the expectation that military contributions will yield influence in Washington. It should do so because American unilateralism, however it may be dressed up as multilateralism, offers the best chance for victory in the war on terror and world order. Ottawa should do so because its own national interests, especially economic, rest in maintaining good relations with Washington. And Canada should do so because, as is now evident in Afghanistan, despite their reduced size and capabilities but with their high caliber and professionalism, the Canadian Forces can still make useful contributions to U.S.-led multilateral operations.

Security relations in North America have become more important to the United States. Thus whatever the course of U.S.-Canadian relations on matters outside North American, it is important for the United

⁷ Christopher Sands, "Canada as a Minor Ally: Operational Considerations for Relations With The United States," Speaking Notes for a Presentation to the 2003 Crude Oil Conference, Kannaskis, Alberta 5 September 2003.

States to recognize that its security relations with Canada must be approached differently than those with other allies.

Indeed David Haglund argues that the Bush administration's focus on overseas collaboration may not serve the national security interests of either country. The United States "should concentrate on what it really needs from Canada, which is obviously not military assistance overseas" but rather that Canada take the necessary steps to ensure that it is not a security liability for the U.S. in the age of terrorism. In this regard, Canadian "military spending levels are less significant than budgetary allocations made to other departments and agencies with a more immediate role in homeland security." This includes intelligence and counter terrorism. Here, he points out, Canadian expenditure is already more proportional relative to the size the two countries' relative wealth than defence spending. "Moreover, cross-border intelligence cooperation, functions more closely than did cooperation between the United States' FBI and CIA prior to 9/11 and perhaps since."⁹

Implicitly if rarely openly, the United States recognizes the new importance of Canada to the immediate physical security of the American people and their economic being. At NORAD headquarters a bi-national planning group is looking at ways to expand cooperation in the maritime and other areas with particular attention to emergency preparedness. The two countries are also working out the impact of the establishment of United States Northern Command, which has specific responsibility for providing forces for homeland defence. Washington will look to Canada to spend more on security in addition to any increased funding for the Canadian Forces.

Given the nature of the terrorist threat and the fact that Canada relies to a greater relative degree upon its professional military for domestic roles than does the US, should CF be oriented now more toward domestic roles and away from overseas commitments? This was the conclusion of a recent Defence Science Advisory Board report which noted that, "The nature of the threat – terrorist activities -- is ...very different from the traditional air, sea and land threats that, until now, have driven Canada's defence strategies and planning." "For the first time since 1945," the country is confronted "with a direct and very different type of threat within the boundaries of the country itself," In meeting this threat; the report also drew attention to the

⁸ Dwight Mason, "Canada and the Future of Continental Defense: A View From Washington," *Policy Papers on the Americas* XIV, Study 10 (September 2003), p.8.

⁹ David Haglund, "North American Security Cooperation in an Era of Homeland Security," *Orbis* 47 (Fall 2003), p.690

impact of the emphasis in American anti-terrorist efforts. "Canada can no longer rely upon U.S. help to the degree previously enjoyed, not only because of the very nature of the threat but because the attentions and resources of the U.S. may very well be focused elsewhere." ¹⁰

There is much wisdom in this assessment and a realistic case can be made that from both American and especially Canadian national interests, Ottawa should focus its efforts in the war on terrorism in North America. The recently released statement, *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*, (NSP) adopts a comprehensive approach which does place a high priority in policy and budgeting on domestic and by extension North American security roles.¹¹ But given the character of American national security policy as it relates to allies, Washington will still look to Canada for some overseas contributions and this will demand additional spending. The Martin government has recognized this and, even in advance of new White Paper on Defence, has announced increases in defence spending to fund certain projects, such as new support ships for the Navy, directly related to overseas roles.¹² At the same time, given limited budgets the NSP rightly points out that in the future Canada "must be selective when concerning the deployment of our armed forces," and that such efforts need to be assessed on the basis of which are "of greatest relevance to our national interest," and whether the forces "have the capacity to meaningfully contribute to a successful outcome."¹³

When it comes to Canada-U.S. security relations, and especially the war on terrorism, Ottawa cannot avoid playing in the "away-game" no matter how much it may increase its important contributions the "home-game" in North America.

¹⁰ David Pugliese, "Canada first, defence panel urges," *Financial Post* 1 February 2004, <http://www.canada.com/search/story.aspx?id=a09fbe6c-d24b-4f67-9e05-4e42865e5fd8>

¹¹ Canada, Privy Council Office, *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (Ottawa: April 2004).

¹² Canada, Office of the Prime Minister, "Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin at CFB Gagetown, New Brunswick," 14 April 2004, www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news.asp?id=172.

¹³ Canada, *Securing an Open Society*, p.50.