

CANADA-US RELATIONS IN THE POST-IRAQ-WAR ERA: STOP THE DRIFT TOWARDS IRRELEVANCE

John J. Noble

Relations with the United States must be the top priority of the Canadian government, writes John Noble, a former diplomat and long time student of Canada-US relations. In refusing to support the US and British led invasion and liberation of Iraq, Jean Chrétien broke with Canada's historic allies and put the UN ahead of the US in Canada's ordering of priorities. In so doing, Noble asserts, Chrétien is not only breaking with history, and neglecting our interests, but allowing Canada to drift towards irrelevance with the US. George W. Bush's cancellation of his scheduled May visit to Canada, and the Ottawa's PM's inability to reschedule it, is a worrisome confirmation that relations will not improve until Chrétien leaves office.

Le gouvernement canadien doit placer ses relations avec les États-Unis au sommet de ses priorités, affirme John Noble, ancien diplomate et observateur de longue date des relations canado-américaines. En refusant d'appuyer l'invasion puis la libération de l'Irak menées par les forces américano-britanniques, Jean Chrétien a rompu avec les alliés historiques de notre pays et privilégié les Nations Unies contre les États-Unis. Ce faisant, il a non seulement tourné le dos à l'histoire et négligé les intérêts canadiens, soutient l'auteur, mais il a en outre diminué l'influence que nous exerçons sur nos voisins du Sud. L'annulation de la visite de George W. Bush, qui devait se rendre à Ottawa en mai, est venue confirmer d'inquiétante façon que les relations entre nos deux pays ne pourront s'améliorer tant et aussi longtemps que Jean Chrétien sera au pouvoir.



There is a widespread perception that the Chrétien government has sacrificed Canada's number one foreign policy priority, our relations with the United States, in favour of Canada's longstanding commitment to the United Nations and multilateralism. There is also a perception that Jean Chrétien was trying to avoid the type of schism which Canada experienced in both world wars, between Quebec and the rest of the country, particularly as Quebecers were going to the polls in the April 15 election won by Jean Charest and the federalist Liberals.

But antiwar sentiment was not limited to Quebec and there was no issue of conscripting troops into Canada's all-volunteer military, as was the case in 1917 and 1944. There was a litany of confusing statements and actions, driven by opinion in a large segment of the Liberal caucus and public opinion at large, which wanted to avoid both a war and Canadian participation in it.

It should have been abundantly clear to all concerned that the first objective was impossible, given the determination of the Bush administration to get rid of Saddam Hussein. It was categorically clear that Canada would not participate militarily in the war when the government

announced it would send troops back to Afghanistan next summer. However, Canada has a sizeable number of troops in the Gulf as part of a multinational naval task force in the battle against terrorism, which could have been double tasked without any difficulty, as undoubtedly the US Navy vessels in that same task force are. Canada's indirect contribution to the US effort was greater than many members of "the coalition of the willing," as US Ambassador Paul Celluci has pointed out, a contribution for which we received no credit, thanks to the equivocations of the prime minister.

The Canadian attempt to find a compromise at the UN Security Council was itself couched in confusion. At one level it appeared simply to be adding a couple more weeks to a process after which Canada would have been prepared to support military force, with or without the active participation of Canadian forces. Any prospect of such a compromise was blown to smithereens by France's announced refusal to sanction any UN resort to force.

Once the war started, Canadian public opinion, except in Quebec, quickly shifted to support for the United States and Britain. Canadians did not want to be seen as neutral in a conflict between Saddam Hussein and its traditional allies

Britain and the United States. The US “disappointment” with Canada’s decision, conveyed publicly by US Ambassador Celluci, brought calls of concern from Canadian business and outrage from Canadian nationalists who relish in criticizing US actions on almost any issue, but turn hostile when the shoe is put on the other foot. The government’s last minute efforts to express support for the United States, on the eve of Baghdad’s surrender, was less than successful.

The real issue is not the likelihood of retaliation from a disappointed United States, but that the evident drift in the management of the relationship by the Chrétien government will result in Canada’s increasing irrelevance in Washington. The changes in senior management at Foreign Affairs and International Trade in mid-June are supposedly designed to put new emphasis on the management of Canada-US relations. Certainly Peter Harder, the new deputy minister of foreign affairs, has been one of the few senior mandarins to be publicly saying, as far back as November 2001, that the single biggest public policy challenge in Canada is to come to terms with what it means to share a common economic space in North America and leverage national advantage. Harder is also on the record as stating that the time has come to achieve a seamless market governed by a single set of rules implemented and administered by the two governments through a “comprehensive bilateral initiative.”

Another possible downside is that individual members of the US Senate or House of Representatives, who already have their own protectionist agendas, will use the excuse of Canada’s non-participation in the war as a further excuse to forward their agendas.

Last December 12, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade issued a land-mark report on advancing Canada’s relations with the United States and Mexico, which called for Canada to advance a



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Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and President George W. Bush in the Rose Garden of the White House — Bush has since cancelled a scheduled visit to Ottawa.

strategic North American vision. There was a total of 39 recommendations on issues ranging from a substantial increase in the defence budget, a security perimeter around North America, the feasibility of developing a permanent North American court on trade and investment and a long term review of options for the Canada-US border to a two-track approach to increasing North American integration by using

both the incrementalist approach and consideration of the implications of a Canada-US customs union.

Relations with the United States have to be the top foreign policy priority of any Canadian government. North American economic integration is happening whether governments like it or not and unless the Canadian government does more to limit the

impact at our border of the uncertainties created by the post 9/11 situation, we are putting Canadian jobs at risk and all that entails for the maintenance of our social welfare system. The naysayers worry that economic integration is a step towards political integration, which is arrant nonsense on both sides of the border. The Americans have long since abandoned any pretence to "Manifest Destiny," and certainly the Republican Party would be most wary of having the political balance in the Senate and House upset by those "liberal/extremist" Canadians. Canadians, for their part, have a long history of not wanting to become part of the United States but of wanting to share in the economic benefits of a close association.

Ambassador Cellucci has stated recently that US security concerns trump Canadian trade concerns. The challenge for Canadian policy makers is how to find a way to mesh these two objectives in a manner which both sides find acceptable. There are some difficult choices ahead and not making them will allow others to make them for us, with consequences which could be very negative for Canada's interests.

For openers, we need a Canadian national security strategy, which will put in one place our objectives, the challenges and how we propose to deal with them. Last September, President Bush issued his National Security Strategy, which included the doctrines of pre-emption and unilateralism, but which also had a lot of strategy and policy for multilateral action, including such words as: "no nation can build a safer, better world alone" and that "alliances and multilateral institutions can multiply the strength of freedom-loving nations." Most Canadian commentators, and indeed Foreign Affairs and International Trade Minister. Minister Bill Graham, failed to comment on Chapter VIII, which mentioned Canada as a centre of world

power and included the statement that "there is little of lasting consequence that the United States can accomplish in the world without the sustained cooperation of its allies and friends in Canada and Europe."

The validity of that statement didn't get buried in the sands of Iraq or in the failure of our efforts to promote a compromise proposal at the UN on Iraq. It means we have to engage the US on a variety of issues and be prepared to discuss their concerns as much as our own. That is how Canada's commitment to multilateralism can be combined with efforts to exert influence with the United States. Take them at their word

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and engage, rather than constantly carping from the sidelines. But we have to be relevant to be taken seriously.

A Canadian national security strategy would not just deal with relations with the US, but the world at large and with issues ranging from defence spending to the environment, trade, energy and aid, as does the American strategy.

The concept of a North American perimeter is not new, and the idea was considered extensively in the SCFAIT report. We have had NORAD for over 45 years, which created a North American perimeter against the Soviet bomber and missile threat no longer exists. Equally, in a reverse sense, we created a North American perimeter to control the export of sensitive technologies outwards.

The new threat to Canada and the United States comes not so much from states but nonstate actors, and the most significant response to that threat comes not from massive new spending on defence, but from changed policy in other areas. I agree we need more spending on defence, but I do not see it as the only response to the increased threats to North America posed by terrorist activities.

First and foremost, we need to plug the holes in Canadian policies and practices which permit potential terrorists easy access to our shores under our refugee policy or visitor policies. I do not think that our regular immigration program, which ensures full security screening before applicants arrive in Canada, is an issue with the Americans. Their concern is with the administration of our refugee policy, which encourages queue jumpers and opens the possibility that terrorists will try to slip in under its provisions, with a view to slipping into the US.

While most Canadians are adamantly opposed to a two-tier medicare system, they seem oblivious to the two-tier immigration system that currently exists because of the procedures adopted to administer our refugee policy. Most immigrants have to go through a lengthy process overseas, which can take up to two years. Those who are in a hurry can jump this queue by coming to Canada and claiming refugee status and immediately become wards of the Canadian welfare system. It is not just high profile cases like the one of Ahmed Ressam which give us a bad reputation in the United States. The recent report of the auditor general says that Citizenship and Immigration Canada faces a growing backlog of removal orders and does not know how well its immigration border controls are working. The gap between the number of removal orders issued and the number of confirmed departures has grown by about 36,000 over the past six years.

Canada has negotiated a safe third country agreement with the US to deal with the two-thirds of refugee claimants who come from the US. That leaves one-third of refugee claimants coming from other countries, mainly European, for whom our standards are among the most generous or lax in the world. The British, have declared Canada to be a safe third country and will return any refugee claimants from Canada to us. Heathrow is the largest single transit point in Europe for refugee claimants coming to Canada. The government should declare all European countries as being safe for refugees and say that we will return all such claimants to those countries for determination of their claims. There is no need to negotiate such agreements with the countries; it can be done unilaterally as the British have done vis-à-vis Canada. DFAIT is balking at such an approach on the basis of concerns for political relations with certain of our European partners, rather than looking at the issue in terms of satisfying American security concerns. This is bad policy which ignores our basic interests for sentimental reasons.

The uncertainties of the border have a negative impact on foreign direct investment. Last November the Conference Board of Canada produced its report *Canada 2010: Challenges and Choices at Home and Abroad*. One of its major findings was: "border management is critical to Canada's economic and physical security. Without assured access to US markets, trade flows will be at risk. Moreover, future investment decisions will be made that locate plants and equipment outside of Canada." A key policy choice suggested in the same report was that "Canada should start to debate the merits of various options for securing access to the U.S. market that range up to, and include, a North American customs union."

In January 2002, the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, produced a report for DFAIT entitled *The Canada-U.S. Border: An*

Automotive Case Study. The report concluded that the "border crossing is an integral part of approximately C\$1000

Canada has never placed its security in the hands of the United Nations in a practical sense. When he was foreign minister, Louis St-Laurent was a prime instigator at the founding of NATO which, together with NORAD, was the prime security instrument for Canada from the beginning of the Cold War to the end of the 1990s.

of Canadian components in U.S. built vehicles and approximately US \$7,400 of U.S. content in Canadian built vehicles. It appears that Canadian assembly and component parts are most exposed to any decay in the reliability and dependability of the border crossing... In particular seating operations that require absolute adherence to a JIT (just-in-time) production schedule discipline and engine and transmission plants that are key capital intensive and require full utilization for profitability are at the greatest risk to any decay in the border's ability to deliver dependable crossing times." The key point is that any foreign investor looking to invest in the North American market will be concerned about the uncertainties of the border and more likely to invest on that side of the border where he sells most of his product, which in almost every case is not Canada.

In Investment Partnerships Canada's *Policy Advocacy Report* of March 2003 there is a graph which shows that Canada's share of incoming foreign direct investment (FDI) from outside North America has declined from just below 10 percent to just below 6 percent, in the period 1988 to 2000. In the same period the US share of inbound FDI has increased from 88 percent to just under 92 percent. In other words we are losing out on FDI to the United States, not to Mexico. This, despite all the efforts employed by government ministers, senior public servants, and ambassadors and trade commissioners to show that Canada is the best place to invest to deal with the North American market. I suggest, as the IPC report does, that one of the key reasons why our message is not

getting through relates to border uncertainty and the myriad of differing regulations on either side of the border.

In terms of the overall management of our relations with the United States, several Canadian sources have suggested a comprehensive approach dealing with both trade and security concerns. The C.D. Howe Institute launched its suggestion of a strategic bargain in a paper by Wendy Dobson last April, and this was supplemented more recently by Hugh Segal, Allan Gottlieb, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives in its proposal for a "North American Security and Prosperity Initiative" and my colleagues Bill Dymond and Michael Hart at the Centre for Trade Policy and Law, in their paper for the C.D. Howe Institute: *Canada and the Global Challenge: Finding a Place to Stand*. All of these ideas suggest a comprehensive agreement which deals not just with trade issues but also with security issues in a manner which ensures that security will not trump trade. They also present what I believe is a convincing case about the dangers of not proceeding in such a comprehensive manner.

Canada has never placed its security in the hands of the United Nations in a practical sense. When he was foreign minister, Louis St-Laurent was a prime instigator at the founding of NATO which, together with NORAD, was the prime security instrument for Canada from the beginning of the Cold War to the end of the 1990s. While peacekeeping came to be a vocation, our soldiers were trained to fight wars and for over almost 40 years we had troops and fighter aircraft in Europe as part of the NATO deterrent to Soviet aggression. Any ideas that the end of the Cold War might



CP Photo

Canadian troops getting a ride from the US Air Force to Afghanistan

finally see the UN come into its own as an effective instrument for international peace and security, as espoused in former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali's "Agenda for Peace," have proved illusive for a variety of reasons, including an American unwillingness to put its security in the hands of such a diverse group of countries who have different value systems.

One of the early actions by the Chrétien government was to almost declare war unilaterally on the European Union for 3,000 tonnes of a fish that most Canadians had never eaten. Prime Minister Chrétien tried to mount an international military effort to stop the atrocities in the Congo, but struck out with the Americans in the mid-1990s and Canada didn't have the capacity to do anything on its own, except offer to lead such a mission. As late as 1999, when faced with seven years of Serb

aggression in the Balkans, NATO countries finally decided to resist the latest atrocities in Kosovo by starting an air war. A conscientious decision was taken not to seek a Security Council mandate, because we knew the Russians would veto it. This was a time when Canada was on the Security Council. Our CF-18s dropped 10 percent of the bombs on the Serbs. By default Canada long ago placed its security in the hands of the United States and our NATO allies.

Canada and the United States are tied together by geography and many more things. Lloyd Axworthy took the decision to proceed with the highly successful anti-personnel land mines convention outside the UN process because he feared, and rightly so, that the UN process would kill it. We kept the proposal for an International Criminal Court out of the Security Council because we knew that the Americans

would veto it. The idea espoused in what Alan Gotlieb has called the "Chrétien Doctrine," that the UN must henceforth endorse any military action against known tyrants is the height of folly and is unlikely to last beyond the mandate of Prime Minister Chrétien.

One of the reasons why Canada is valued on the world scene is our ability to speak frankly to the Americans and to influence their positions. I am concerned that the rising level of knee-jerk anti-Americanism within the Liberal Party and its elected members, and in other parties, too, is putting at risk a lot more than our economic interests, but also our ability to bear influence with the administration and Congress on foreign policy issues as well. The PM appears to have taken a page out of the Canadian Alliance's populist credo that politicians must always bow to the

collective wisdom of the electorate, rather than providing leadership. On the other hand, I must admit that Stephen Harper has abandoned his party's credo that the electorate are always right and has taken a position of principle on the Iraq war, even though Canadian public opinion is against him.

If press reports from a senior source in the government are to be believed, that only two ministers expressed concerns about the position on Iraq, we are in deeper trouble than I thought. The idea that Canada and Mexico decided this course because they had got nothing from the Bush administration on issues of concern to them is the height of folly, since it suggests that our so called principles have a price which hasn't yet been paid. Furthermore, the reality is that we have more troops in the region providing support to the US, even if indirect, than most members of the coalition. That means we could have supported the American action without involving any

troops at all, or only those that are already in the region. Iraq is not Vietnam, where Canada's role was to represent the West and the Americans on the ICC (Poland represented the Communists and India the non-aligned). This is about what the United States perceives as a fundamental threat to its security. We are no longer America's best friend and ally, as demonstrated by the cancellation of President Bush's May 5 visit to Ottawa, and the subsequent inability of the PM's office to re-schedule so long as Chrétien remains in office.

I am not saying we cannot differ with the United States. But we have to choose our battles with the US carefully, and appearing to side with Saddam Hussein put us in bed with a tyrant. Siding with the United Nations put us in bed with a process rather than a concrete objective. As I understand the Canadian compromise, it would have led to armed intervention in the event of non-compliance, which was all but certain.

We need a foreign policy that accurately reflects Canada's interests and is not based on a need to differ for the sake of being different or sentimental. Because the Canadian family is so diverse, there is a constituency for almost any issue anywhere. That doesn't mean that fundamental Canadian interests are involved everywhere.

The Liberal Party and the NDP were on the wrong side of history with respect to the free trade debate in the 1980s. If current trends continue they will be on the wrong side of history with respect to how to deal with the realities of increasing North American integration. Clearly nothing significant will happen until regime change comes to Ottawa.

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