

Great Canadian Question: Canada & the World

Title: Southward or Outward?: Securing the Future of Canada's World Status^[1]

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The post-Cold War world has, in many ways, thrown away the rulebook of international relations; we have witnessed the disintegration of a clearly defined world-wide bilateral system, the rise in importance of non-state actors, and an ever-decreasing space between nations and people through globalization. But when the dust settles, where will Canada's place be? Should Canada look southward to the U.S., and strive towards better bilateral relations, co-operation, and acknowledgment? Or should Canada look outwards to establish a new international face, and become a major player in multilateral institutions and development? This paper posits that these stances, of Allan Gotlieb and Janice Stein respectively, are not mutually exclusive and that Canada's path must be simultaneously southward *and* outward to secure a favourable international standing in the future.

To clearly understand Canada's orientation in the post-Cold War system, it is perhaps best to begin by summarizing the defining characteristics of the present international relations *zeitgeist*^[2]. I will then analyze Canada's international posture since the Cold War; the successes, failures, triumphs, and predicaments Canada has seen. Lastly I will provide a synthesis of the works of Stein and Gotlieb and suggest a regimen to strengthen and build upon that posture.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was initially a time for celebration. The end of the oppressive Soviet regime brought democracy to eastern European nations, reuniting families in the process and allowing the West to breathe a collective sigh of relief. Yet the absence of the Soviet sphere did not usher in order and prosperity; rather, the distorted balance of power – in accordance with realist theory – has allowed smaller conflicts to crop up. Following the Cold War, these 'brushfire' conflicts have been centred in developing regions (Somalia 1991, Sierra Leone 1991, Rwanda 1994, Chechnya 1994, Kosovo 1999 for a sample). As Gotlieb notes, these conflicts have also been mostly internally oriented (e.g., civil wars, ethnic purges) as opposed to the inter-state proxy wars characteristic of the Cold War.

The spread of conflict in developing regions has been met with the rise of the non-governmental organization (NGO). Non-state actors, whether they are aid organizations, economic unions, or terrorist groups, have had increased presence in the international scene by bridging states or threatening them. Beyond the domestic presence they have always enjoyed, NGOs use the freedom of the new multilateral system to influence governments around the world.

These NGOs have an increasing influence thanks to the phenomenon of globalization. Globalization has made near-instantaneous interaction – especially the transfer of news, ideas, and goods – a reality. This has had a number of impacts on international relations. First, populations are more aware of world events and urge politicians to act (the so-called ‘CNN effect’). Second, nations have become increasingly dependent on each other; consider that the U.S. conducted imports and exports valuing 9% of its GDP in 1960 – forty years later, U.S. imports and exports grew to value 25% of its GDP^[3]. Third, this economic reliance on other nations has increased national vulnerability; sectors around the world feel the sting of globalized terrorism as witnessed in stock markets, tourism, and airlines after 11 September 2001^[4].

For Canada, these strange new circumstances have been met with mixed results. Canada’s successes at nation-building and its advanced ideas of promoting NGOs provide a vantage point from which to move forward, yet our national hands are still tied by our relations with our southern partners.

Yet as the security issues in the developing world drag on, clashing with the greatest military powers in the world in Afghanistan and Iraq, Canada has become an ‘old hand’ at international development efforts. From Lester Pearson’s commitment to resolving the Suez Crisis by introducing a non-combatant force and to Cyprus and beyond^[5], Canada’s long and proud involvement with peacekeeping has garnered an international reputation. This status, coupled with the concepts of ‘human security’ as a constructive force has placed Canada in a favourable position to advise and address the problems in the developing world^[6]. Lloyd Axworthy saw the value of peacekeeping and development in the post-Cold War world when he spoke before the House of Commons in the mid-1990s:

We seek to be an activist, a partner nation encouraging global systems of security and human improvement, helping to shape rules and procedures, advancing the cause of human rights and strengthening the ties of trade so we can help people grow and prosper.^[7]

Given the development efforts in Haiti, Afghanistan, and those like Darfur yet to be realized, this is a critically important field of building both nations and – most importantly – human standards of living. Canada’s experiences abroad provide much leverage here.

The rise of the NGO has given Canadians further reason to rejoice over their situation. The promotion of international norms of peaceful conduct has been a focus of many NGOs, and Canada developed a talent for dealing with them. Stein notes the Canadian successes with the International Committee to Ban Land Mines and the International Criminal Court^[8] and other examples exist. Canada’s status as a constructivist middle power means we have a head start in what Peter Howard and Reina Neufeldt call “corridors of power.” Though Canada’s contribution to the world in simple terms of foreign aid dollar value has decreased, these successful international agreements

which Canada has been pivotal in advancing have a strength in projecting *ideas* with the agenda and ability to reconstruct the international system.^[9]

Despite these advantages, Canada is still tethered closely to its southern neighbour. It is no secret the reliance Canada and the U.S. have on each other: Canada generates a substantial trade surplus (\$20.56 billion last year) with the U.S. far and away the prime trade destination^[10]. The oil, timber, and textiles flowing between our states are compounded by the large amount of individuals living along the border. While some people may routinely physically cross the border to conduct business, even more cross it electronically – with the transfer of ideas and information. These dependence factors can be beneficial to Canadians but also profoundly disruptive, as the cross-border chaos of 11 September 2001 and the softwood lumber disputes have shown.

Where does Canada go from here? What is the best way to ensure that Canadians prosper and remain relevant in the world for the next century? Is it to make our bed with the powerful U.S., or look elsewhere?

Gotlieb reminds us that no countries have had such an enduring relationship as the U.S. and Canada. He sees difficulties in our institutional compatibility which, if resolved, would grant Canada a higher status in the eyes of the U.S. and better secure our important symbiosis. Stein too notes that the U.S. is a global economic giant in need of special persuasion to acknowledge Canadian interests. Whatever direction Canada sees itself moving towards, the U.S. must be close: the reliance on each other will not disappear soon (if ever) and should be maintained if Canada wants to advance. Adhering to Gotlieb's sound advice on dealing with the U.S.^[11] promises to elevate us into the minds of American decision-makers to help satisfy our economic and political needs.

Beyond the U.S., Stein realizes the 'people power' in Canada and insists "Canada will generally do better on a regulated multilateral playing field." Gotlieb himself concedes the advantages Canada has in multilateral relations and the potential for shaping those relations. From the analysis of the successes of Canada with development operations and NGOs and their relevance in the post-Cold War world, Stein has a strong point.

The "hard power" investments that Gotlieb prescribes for Canada could help in development operations similar to Afghanistan, but Canada has functioned better in regions without the perceived pretence of occupation. The best way to avoid combat situations like Afghanistan and Iraq will require our leaders to forecast the possibility of states slipping towards totalitarian regimes and intervene in advance, meeting the needs of a country's population in situations of civil unrest when their government cannot.

Indeed, Canada's best way forward is Stein's thesis of the use of its skills at development, diplomacy, and spreading ideas. Howard and Neufeldt's theories of Canada as a 'tipping power' in advancing new international norms can and should be considered a draft manifesto in the process of revolutionizing our world status. Yet we will not get far without our partners to the south. As stated, our reliance will not disappear overnight.

Gotlieb's thoughts on the importance of our relationship and how to improve it must also be considered. A friendlier facility for resolving bilateral issues will help many Canadian domestic issues as globalization continues to underline the importance of trade and travel for national success.

While Stein and Gotlieb see different directions for Canada, both are right. Canada must move simultaneously southward *and* outward. We must exercise our powers of development and diplomacy to build ties around the world, but guaranteeing the friendly attention of the U.S. will grant security to our economic and political interests.

Notes & References

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- [1] I am indebted to Dr. Frank Harvey and Dr. Brian Bow of the Dalhousie University Department of Political Science for their helpful insights presented in lectures, and to Kristen Behie and Katie Gillivan for helpful comments and critiques.
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- [4] Gillis, J. Matthew. "A Genuine and Credible Threat: the Impact of Terrorism on International Economic Development." 2007.
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