

America and the Canadian Presence

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April 2011

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As the United States faces global challenges, how does Canada fit in?¹

essence: The United States Interest in an
memorable section of the book, Dickey notes
al relationship:

“December 7 1971 (...) The Prime Minister of Canada gave the Parliament a potentially historic report of a discussion he had in Washington the previous day with the President of the United States. The meeting of the two leaders was of special interest, at least in Canadian eyes: several months earlier, within a thirty day period, the American President had twice made unhappy news from coast to coast in Canada.

“On August 15, President Nixon’s dramatically announced new economic policy, with its imposition of a surcharge on United States imports, had produced instant trauma throughout Canada. (...)”

“On September 16, Canadian sensibilities received a second seismic jolt. President Nixon, in an effort to reassure the American public about trade discussions with Japan, announced at a White House news conference: (...) “Japan is our biggest customer in the world.” Coming as it did hard on the August 15 shock, the President’s confusion of Japan with Canada as the best customer of the United States seemed to many Canadians to confirm their worst fears as to where Canada stood in the hierarchy of American interests and understanding.²”

The year 1971 was a difficult one for the relationship between the United States and Canada. Beyond the misunderstandings noted by Dickey, the Nixon administration ended the traditional policy of seeking an exemption for Canada from significant trade and economic policy actions. The United States sought but failed to get Canadian participation in the Vietnam War. Social movements in the United States for civil rights and an end to the war were compelling but alien experiences for Canadians. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his government responded to popular Canadian anxieties about the United States, which in 1971 had come to seem like a national emergency by introducing a “Third Option” foreign policy of finding new and presumably better friends than the Americans.

¹ This document is based on remarks given by Christopher Sands in honor of the 40th Anniversary of the Western Washington University Center for Canadian American Studies in Bellingham on April 29, 2011.

² John Sloan Dickey, *Canada and the American Presence: The United States Interest in an Independent Canada* (New York University Press, 1975) pp. 133-4

Out of the doubts about the future of this bilateral friendship in 1971 between Canada and the United States came one very important thing: the foundation of the Center for Canadian-American Studies at Western Washington University. In the forty years since, the Center has been a source of scholarship and optimism that the problems that beset both countries can be resolved with hard work, insightful research, and mutual goodwill. The faculty and students that have contributed to the Center over the years have exemplified the spirit that has made these two countries enduring friends and allies.

Yet in 1971, it was not obvious how this friendship would continue. U.S. economic problems, American weariness with the burden of leadership in the West and the long struggle with Communism that led to a perception of American decline, the real costs at home and abroad of a war half a world away, energy price shocks, protectionist sentiments in Congress, and environmental concerns that had begun to worry many Americans – there was a lot to preoccupy U.S. attention and the Canadian relationship suffered.

At the same time, in 1971 Canada's "Third Option" policy seemed to be retreating from a close relationship with the United States when it most needed its friends. Canada's economic policies were bolstered by strong commodity prices during the oil shocks of the 1970s and the inflation that followed, but their protectionist and statist orientation alienated international investors and foreign companies, including many U.S. multinationals.

Today, some of the same conditions recur, but the state of the Canadian relationship is much better.

The United States in 2011 is struggling with the burdens of global leadership; one Obama administration official has labeled the approach "leading from behind."³ After prolonged discussions within the administration and among the United States and key allies, the United States remains engaged (in the form of ground troops) in Afghanistan and Iraq, and has entered a third conflict in Libya. Oil prices are high, along with other commodity prices, and inflation is gathering strength. The U.S. Congress has added protectionist "Buy American" conditions to stimulus spending and other legislation, and many U.S. states are considering local production as one criterion for qualification of energy for renewable portfolio standards and carbon reduction programs – discriminating against Canadian energy imports. The integration of the defense industrial base between Canada and the United States has been undermined by U.S. export controls for a wide array of dual-use technologies that could, conceivably, give terrorists a weapon against the United States, and by International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITARs) that restrict who can work in a facility handling sensitive information relation to the defense of the United States. Many post-2001 border security measures have had the effect of adding to the cost associated with crossing the U.S.-Canadian border, and this has been a drag on trade. And

³ Ryan Lizza. "The Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy" The New Yorker May 2, 2011

medium term, a more integrated continental economy provides the best route to participation and positioning.

Reaching the Limits of Current Governance Integration

The flows that cross borders are becoming as important as those which remain within borders. This is true in the economic sense – when the flows are financial, or commercial. It is also true when the flows are carrying terrorists, organized crime, and other threats. The internet gives us access to a world of information, but also gives the world access to our information, with worrying consequences for personal security and privacy. A salmonella

Getting these processes right will require the governments to push beyond the current limits on the integration of governance of the ~~cross~~ border flows upon which our economies depend. This will require greater mutual awareness and sensitivity to the risks

Baby Boomers had landmark works like

optimum relationship they may have tomorrow. Indeed, even today's problem clouded weather could hardly fail to benefit them."

Today, the weather for the United States and Canada is a bit cloudy again, even if not by the standards of the Pacific Northwest. However Canadians have reacted to the current turbulence by seeking to improve the bilateral relationship, rather than by seeking a Third Option alliance with another world power. This presents an opportunity, and a promise that U.S. leaders ought to embrace. The "creative venturist" that Dickey