

Canada could be a world power, but not without rethinking our goals

Cease the feckless pursuit of popularity that is of little practical utility

by Conrad Black



Canadian soldiers return from Vimy Ridge in a photo that has been colourized. Canada's distinguished performance during World War One confirmed its status on the world stage, writes Conrad Black. PHOTO BY CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM/GEORGE METCALF ARCHIVAL COLLECTION/THE VIMY FOUNDATION

Without it ever having been a matter of national debate or even public articulation, Canada's foreign policy has evolved in the post-Cold War era to one of relatively tenuous connection to traditional allies and a nebulous pursuit of popularity in the developing world. The end of the Cold War and of the bipolarized era has enabled Canada to play a relatively detached role that more accurately reflects the musings of its leaders than any identifiable strategic interest. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that Canada is "post-national" and has hotly pursued a temporary seat on the Security Council of the United Nations, unsuccessfully courting a large number of underdeveloped and questionably democratic countries. For much of its history Canada's foreign policy was dictated by its comparative insecurity as an independent sovereign state. It can afford its present policy without danger to its security, but the point of it is not clear.

Canada's founder, Samuel de Champlain, had a brilliant vision of a great New France in the northern part of this continent

that would grow to be a second bulwark of French civilization in the world. He even sold this vision to the generally skeptical master of the 17th-century French state, Cardinal Richelieu. When Richelieu married King Louis XIII's sister off to Britain's King Charles I, an informal Anglo-French alliance arose that survived the Cromwell interlude and continued until Charles' son James II was sent packing by his own daughter and her husband, the Dutch King William III, in the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1687. How glorious it was is a matter of some debate, but from this point and for 200 years France had the greatest army in Europe and Britain the greatest Navy and Britain could only intervene marginally in Europe to maintain a balance amongst states with an approximately equivalent correlation of forces, Spain, France, Austria, Russia, Prussia, Turkey. But Britain took what it wanted in the world beyond Europe, including North America, India, South Africa, Gibraltar, Malaya, Hong Kong, Suez and Australia.

Sir Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester, Canada's greatest statesman since Champlain, saw the American Revolution coming and envisioned a bicultural Canada, and founded Upper Canada (Ontario). He spent four years lobbying for support in London for the Québec Act, passed in 1774, just before the Americans rebelled, by which French Canadians pledged their loyalty to the British crown in exchange for the assurance of the preservation of their language, religion and civil law. Both sides honoured the agreement and by a hair's breadth French and English Canadians with British support resisted American attempts at annexation in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Thereafter, agile Canadian statesman, especially Robert Baldwin and Louis H. LaFontaine, sought independence in all but defence and foreign affairs and the civil rights of legislative self-government enjoyed by the peoples of Great Britain and America. It required great finesse to achieve this without provoking the British into abandoning their traditional protection of Canada in exchange for some consideration from the U.S.

The United States walked on eggshells toward its terrible Civil War, and had to tolerate Canada, but once victorious, the insurrection suppressed and slaves emancipated, in 1865, with the greatest army and generals in the world and after the assassination of the great and judicious Abraham Lincoln, everyone realized that if Canada was not to be absorbed by the United States it had to be shaped into a country and launched. It was in these circumstances that John A. Macdonald, (currently widely and shamefully traduced by ingrates and academic idiots), George-Etienne Cartier, and George Brown fashioned the world's only transcontinental, bicultural, parliamentary Confederation ever, which effectively became an autonomous country in 1867, to considerable skepticism in London and Washington. Today, of countries as populous as Canada, only the British and Americans have older continuous political institutions than Canada does. British sponsorship and growing American maturity permitted Canada to grow rapidly and massive immigration in the Laurier years enabled to keep pace demographically with the ever rising American giant. Canada's distinguished performance in World War I confirmed its status as a victorious sovereign power and cofounder of the League of Nations. It was only at this point, and after several years of consideration, and even though two-thirds of the business conducted by the British Embassy in Washington was on behalf of Canada, that Canada exchanged ministers with the United States, and also with France, in the mid-1920s. These officials, along with the High Commissioner in London, formed the original Canadian diplomatic corps, and Canada's first autonomous international agreement was the Halibut Treaty with the U.S. in 1923.

Canada's formidable contribution to Allied victory in World War II, and the fall of France and shattering of Japan, Germany, and Italy, left us one of the world's important countries, as we remain. Canada was a cofounder of the United Nations and NATO, and conducted a foreign aid program proportionately as generous as the American Marshall Plan in

favour of Western Europe. Louis St. Laurent and Lester Pearson contributed importantly to resolving the Suez crisis of 1956 provoked by the rank stupidity of the British and the French. Brian Mulroney reversed Pierre Trudeau's fatuous placation of the communist powers, that was as much designed to impress Quebec nationalists as anything else. Mulroney won Canada great admiration for his role in fighting famine in Ethiopia and apartheid in South Africa, and in transforming an Open Skies conference in Ottawa into a major power agreement on the reunification of Germany in 1990. Ever since he has been unjustly accused of being too friendly with American presidents; Canadian prime ministers have kept their distance from the United States, without replacing Mulroney's policy with anything coherent. The only foreign policy distinction Canada has enjoyed in the past 25 years was Stephen Harper's staunch support of Israel.

Canada has never been in an unjust or losing war. It has always been a reliable ally and never been animated by any motive of greed, intrusion or domination. No one has any serious grievance against this country. Canada is uniquely and admirably positioned to lead a call for the renovation of the United Nations, NATO, the Commonwealth, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and all of them are in desperate need of it. The UN now is chiefly a corrupt provider of primal scream therapy for poor and despotic countries. The Western Alliance has degenerated into the gracious collective acceptance of an American military guarantee while most member countries including Canada pay only a fraction of what they had pledged to the common defence. We should lead international research into climate change and a greater comprehension of that issue, which now divides the principal industrial powers who are skeptical of it and the Western Europeans who have largely capitulated to an assault on the petroleum and nuclear power industries that is motivated more by the animosity toward capitalism of the international left than by any comprehensible notion of how to

in enhance the environment.

Canada could be a great power, not a superpower like the United States and China, but in the same category as Britain, France, Germany and Japan. But to do this we must espouse serious and useful goals of international reform and accelerate economic growth. Our ministry of global affairs as it is now portentously called, should repurpose itself to those ends, maintain a generous and focused foreign aid program, and cease its feckless and extravagant pursuit of popularity in disadvantaged areas where it cannot be bought for long and is of little practical utility. Justin may think Canada is post-national, but the world isn't.

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