

Canada Should Now Move Beyond Being a Middle Power

by Conrad Black



I have been trying desperately to find a Canadian subject to write about and am as fatigued with the Trump story as are some grumbling readers. It is time for some perspective on both countries. In the current mania, hundreds of thousands of people marched in protests over much of the world because of the suspension of the right to enter the United States for 90 days of citizens of the leading terrorism-promoting state (Iran), and six states riven by chronic violence, much of it generated by terrorist organizations (Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen). The minority leader of the U.S. Senate publicly burst into tears over the fate of the victims though he emphatically approved Barack Obama, who also condemned this step last week, when he imposed a similar measure, with less apparent reason. Peggy Wente in *The Globe and Mail* unctuously regretted that the U.S. “looks as if it is descending into a dark place,” but did remind readers that a 90-day ban on refugees from seven terrorist-infested and sponsoring countries was “not the Holocaust.” (If we protested every time there was inconvenience at airports, we would all be marching every day.) Countries can control their own borders but this

was an unexceptionable measure sloppily implemented. But the Trump debate has become so polarized we may soon be hearing recitals from Gustave Le Bon's 1895 book on the Psychology of Crowds, if not Jose Ortega y Gasset's "Revolt of the Masses" (1930).

The horrible and tragic murders in the Quebec Muslim centre on Sunday brought suitable comment, but why are Justin Trudeau and Quebec Premier Couillard calling it an act of terrorism? There is no evidence that the indicted suspect would qualify as a terrorist. Nor is the Canadian media's effort to conclude, before any evidence has been publicly taken, that a formerly sensible 27-year old student was transformed into a mass murderer by following the Trump campaign, and by the brief visit to Quebec last year of France's National Front leader, Marine Le Pen. Trump is calling for measures to reduce violence and Le Pen, though critical of some concessions made to French Muslims, is certainly not an advocate of violence and expelled her father from the party he founded, in 2015, when he was 87, for minimizing the significance of the Holocaust. Because Trudeau and Couillard were saying it was an act of terrorism, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, briefly took that line up as well, when he was being pressed by journalists about the 90-day travel ban.

The Canadian political landscape bears little resemblance to the conditions that elevated Trump. As I have written before, Trump was a third party candidacy, a "movement" as former Yugoslav Melania Trump called it, opposed to all the factions of both major parties, and to the entire leadership of the country – the media, entertainment industry, polling organizations, academia, Wall Street, and the federal bureaucracy. Trump won control of the Republicans with his renegade candidacy and then won the election with a program that was radically reformist in health care (seeking universal coverage), trade (to modify existing arrangements that exported unemployment into the U.S.), curbing union abuses,

especially the teachers' unions, and dismantling environmental policies based on unsubstantiated fears of global warming. It was also a straight conservative and economic growth program for lower taxes on small personal and all corporate income, incentivizing the repatriation of overseas profits and more efficient and less costly government.

The last 20 years have been the first period of absolute and relative decline in American history, apart from the Civil War. The United States has a historic pattern of the presidential office seeking the man in times of crisis. There has never been so judicious and irreproachable a founder of a country as George Washington, nor so patient, determined, eloquent, courageous and good-humoured a conservator of a fractured country as Lincoln. In 1932, what was needed was a political genius to bring the country through the Great Depression and then out of isolationism, to inspire the country and then assure the triumph of democracy in the world against satanic enemies. The deus ex machina Roosevelt emerged. A chess master of grand strategy was required to extract the U.S. from Vietnam undefeated and to triangulate Great Power relationships with China, and Nixon did it; and to cure the malaise that followed, someone had to uplift the country and let America be America, and Reagan did that, and won the Cold War to boot, without Russia and America exchanging a shot. Trump set himself the goal of routing all the declinists, and banishing the sophistry and intellectual corruption of a failed elite, enfeebled by protracted incumbency. Of course Trump isn't remotely as suave a personality as the other presidents mentioned, but his task is different and it will require an overpoweringly energetic and pugnacious person to accomplish it.

Canada's position is entirely different and it is nonsense to accuse Kellie Leitch and Kevin O'Leary of emulating Trump in their quest for the Conservative leadership. Canada has had an excellent era while the U.S. has been mired in the Middle East

and in fiscal shambles and internal discord and increasing violence. Partly Canada has prospered precisely because for the first time the United States has been less of an overwhelming contiguity. From Macdonald, struggling to organize the confederation and building a miraculous railway to unite it, to Laurier seeking vast increases in immigration to keep pace with the U.S. and preserving the country during the conscription crisis of 1917, to King getting the country through another world war while avoiding such a crisis, and the ultimate victory over the Quebec separatists attained by Trudeau, Mulroney and Chrétien, it has always been a struggle to maintain purposeful national self-confidence.

Too often there has been recourse to snide and envious reflections on the U.S.; we have not had the luxury of comparing ourselves to Belgium or Argentina (which had as high a standard of living as Canada in 1945), and even now, after a period when Canada has been better governed than the U.S., we see this unattractive trait is prominent in covering the Trump phenomenon. Of course our media are just parroting the America press and television, but the American media are fighting for their jobs against a candidate who drew huge applause at every campaign appearance when he called them, with some reason, a wretched band of liars, (as when a Time magazine writer reported last week the falsehood that Trump had had a bust of Martin Luther King removed from the oval office; an implicit false and malicious accusation of racism). The Canadian media should be more detached and analytical.

There is no mountain of accumulated misgovernment to dispose of in Canada, as there is in Washington. What the country is waiting for, from Justin Trudeau and from the Conservatives, is a plan to make the big and timely push to move Canada from a "middle power" politely tugging at the sleeve of the Americans, into a fully formed G7 country, one of the 10 or 12 most important of the world's 198 countries. We have to stop being envious children with our noses pressed against the

window of the great American candy store and reality theatre, and take the last step to being a great nation.

Let's become a world leader in innovative legislation and in the reform of international organizations. The United Nations, NATO, Commonwealth, and IMF are all decrepit and we are founding members and are well-placed to propose change. Why not the best? This government and the next Conservative leader should explain the impending transformation of Canada into a country of quiet, justified, confidence, not carpers and certainly not braggarts. Macdonald, Laurier, and Pierre Trudeau knew how to stir the country's imagination and move it up the ladder of nations. King managed it without exciting anyone. As the United States tumultuously tries to pull itself together, it is time for us to stop being a trans-border voyeur and scold, and move up in the world to where we now belong. Anyone who can do that is the next Conservative leader.

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