

# In treating Canada as an enemy, Trump made a serious mistake

By Conrad Black

There is a message in the current tariff imbroglio between the United States and Canada, Mexico, and China that can be usefully taken on board by other countries with extensive relations with the United States.



U.S. President Donald Trump (L) and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (R) in 2019. (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)

The provocations of the Mexicans and Chinese were conspicuous and it is little wonder that the new administration responded strongly.

The Mexicans comprehensively canvassed American manufacturers for years and encouraged them to relocate their factories to just inside the Mexican-US border where Mexico would assist in constructing a new plant, give an operating tax holiday, and the employers would enjoy cheap labour rates for fabricating parts supplied from China and selling them back into the United States as finished goods on the favoured basis of the North American Free-Trade Agreement. All the while, the Mexicans were promoting the flow of millions of destitute people illegally across its border with the US. The astonishing fact in this is that the Biden administration tolerated all this without retaliation. It is hardly a surprise that the Trump administration has not.

The message is, not that the Trump regime will strike hard blows in the country's economic self-interest, but that it will treat chronic and marginal offenders equally. The Americans have very little to complain about Canada. There has not been a significant issue between those countries in over 200 years, and President Trump's complaint in justifying the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff on Canadian imports was a flimsy allegation that 13,000 undesirables had entered the United States across the northern border in recent years bringing some quantity of lethal and illicit narcotics with them. This is approximately one 1000th of the total of those whom the Americans admitted flooding across their southern border in the last four years and the value of illicit drugs that they smuggled into the U would have been at approximately the same ratio.

Canada is an unambiguous ally of the United States and a fair-trading country. President Trump has stated that Canada's trade negotiators were more skillful than their American analogues, but the answer to that is to raise the competence of American trade negotiators, not to penalise the Canadians for doing their jobs well.

These complaints about the borders are essentially nonsense, as it is up to each country to maintain its borders at the level of thoroughness in monitoring incoming visitors or immigrants as closely as it judges appropriate. Trump's complaint is with Biden for throwing open the southern border to 10 to 15 million illegal migrants in the last four years and this was one of the principal reasons for his reelection.

No one flees from Canada or can plausibly claim to be a political refugee because of oppression in Canada, so instead of stirring peaceable Canadians to a state of patriotic anger as he has, President Trump would have done better to promise to reduce the number of illegal migrants to the United States who have been so frightened by Trump's Draconian promises to throw them out that they have illegally crossed into Canada.

And if he is going to demand, as he has, that Canada take steps to reduce the quantity of fentanyl that passes from Canada into the US, Trump should undertake to reduce the flow of guns that illegally enter Canada from the United States each year. Canada's per capita murder and violent crime rate is between 50 and 67 per cent less than that of the US and in Canada there is no constitutional right to bear arms; although the legal right to possess firearms in Canada is accessible for law-abiding adults, it is not a constitutional right.

Canadians are proud, to the point of being slightly priggish about it, of the fact that Canada has never really offended any other country. Even in the world wars, Germany had no grievance against or designs on Canada and only found itself at war with Canada because a large number of able-bodied Canadian men chose to enlist voluntarily in the worldwide struggle for human freedom and dignity. For Canada to be lumped in unjustly with a country which has so comprehensively and dishonestly affronted the United States as Mexico has, has severely irritated what is normally one of the world's most peaceable nationalities. Though it is hard to be precise about this, the world seems to have noticed the flippancy with which the American president has gone to the brink of commercial war with an unexceptionably friendly neighbouring country.

Not since Charles de Gaulle took the occasion of a state visit to Canada in 1967 to observe the centenary of the Confederation of that country to urge a live audience of 200,000 people and a television audience of millions that Québec secede from the Canadian Confederation, have Canadians felt so aggrieved at the conduct towards them of a Great Power. In this case, that has been compounded by President Trump's gratuitous reflections upon Canada as the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the US, As if it were a failed country with only two per cent of America's population, instead of a successful G-7 country with a population of 41 million and a quality of life for its citizens that is in many ways superior to that of the United

States.

Though Canada is never a frightening or overly belligerent country, it isn't a doormat like Greenland or Panama either and is capable of causing the United States considerable inconvenience if provoked. The matter seems now to be de-escalating and Trump can make his customary triumphalist claims of having made his point. But in the case of Canada, he has treated an inoffensive ally shabbily and apparently for his own self-amusement. It will probably all pass quickly but treating a friend like an enemy is never wise, rarely excusable, and sometimes a serious mistake.

*First published in the [Brussels Signal](#)*