

Let's De-Escalate Trump's Tariffs Insofar as Canada Is Concerned

By Conrad Black

President Trump has not, as the Wall Street Journal claimed on Saturday, unleashed "the Dumbest Trade War in History;" at least not in respect of Mexico and Communist China. It may, though, be in contention for that honor in respect of Canada. In holding Mexico and China, as the president claims, "accountable to their promises of ending illegal immigration and stopping the flow of deadly fentanyl and other drugs into our country," the steps he is taking are justifiable.

They have abused Mexico's status in the tripartite North American Free Trade Agreement, and have effectively facilitated an invasion of destitute people across



President Trump signs executive orders in the Oval Office at the White House. AP/Evan Vucci

the southern border of the United States while also being complicit in the illegal entry into America of a large number of dangerous criminals and a horrifying quantity of lethal narcotics. The offenses that Mexico and China have inflicted on the United States are substantially economic and this justifies strong economic counter-measures against Mexico and

China.

Unfortunately, associating Canada with the conduct of China and Mexico is an outrage. The total number of claimed illegal entrants from Canada is approximately one tenth of one percent of those from Mexico, and we could reasonably expect the United States to take the measures necessary to prevent their entry. Canada has a greater grievance against the United States for the number of illegal migrants across America's southern border that have come north and illegally entered Canada. President Trump knows that the government of Canada has had no hand in illegal cross-border activity and that it has already taken action to show that on immigration, the positions of the United States and Canada are practically identical.

The president's principal complaint, which was one of the main reasons for his reelection, is against the Biden administration for its monstrously inadequate effort to secure the southern border. Since the problem on the northern border is one thousandth the size in both numbers of illegal migrants and the quantity of illegal drugs of the problem with Mexico, and trade complaints must be a similar fraction of concern with Mexico, a basic grasp of Grade 3 arithmetic is all that is needed to conclude that equal treatment of Mexico and Canada is grossly unfair to Canada. It's, after all, the duty of every country to maintain its own borders.

The president is also aware that the outgoing Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, recently rejected requests from the governments of both Germany and China to sell oil and natural gas to them at world prices, in part in order to continue to sell them to the United States at substantial discounts to world prices, and that the United States sells on to the world millions of barrels of Canadian oil every day at substantial profits to the United States. The president is leaving himself needlessly open to charges of bad faith in treating what has been an indulgent Canadian policy with such hostility.

By acting as he has, he has assured that Canada will end these arrangements with the United States and sell to foreign buyers in greater quantities and at more advantageous prices. As a successful businessman, Mr. Trump knows that such a development is not in the interests of the United States. He is presumably seeking to repatriate some of the American auto industry, but this isn't the way to do it with Canada.

Canada will probably have a general election in May and at the latest in September, which the present opposition Conservative party is almost certain to win. That party has altered its position to revise but not abolish some of the favorable arrangements the United States now enjoys with Canadian oil and gas if America will revive the XL pipeline that President Biden cancelled and that will create many jobs in both countries and reduce energy costs in the United States and enable export of Canadian energy through ports in the Gulf of America.

A Conservative government will devote some of the increased revenue to satisfying very justified complaints about Canada's seriously inadequate commitment to national and NATO defense. Everything is in place for the civilized satisfaction of all of Mr. Trump's expressed disagreements with Canada. There was no justification for recourse to such extreme measures. In his announcements, the president said that these tariffs would be temporary if the countries involved amended their conduct appropriately. Given that Canada is already doing that and that its conduct was minimally blameworthy in the first place on immigration and drug control matters, there is reason for hope that at least in the case of Canada, this is a temporary assault upon good U.S.-Canadian relations.

There is another, overarching point. Of the other 197 nations in the world, (including Taiwan, the Vatican, and Palestine), there is none with which the United States has a more durably cordial and positive relationship than with Canada. We have been on the same side in every serious world crisis since

General Jackson defeated the Duke of Wellington's brother-in-law at New Orleans in 1815. Canada received 40,000 fugitive slaves prior to the Civil War and President Lincoln thanked the government of the then United Province of Canada for its assistance against attempted Confederate conspiracies against the Union from Canada.

Millions of people in both countries have close relatives in the other country and tens of millions of people visit the other country each year, and they are each other's largest trading partner. President Trump and other senior members of his administration should be aware that the world is watching, and it is wondering what this appalling mistreatment of the most constant, proximate, and unexceptionable ally that the United States has in the world means for its reliability in its relationships with other countries.

Readers are aware of my general, though not automatic support of President Trump for many years, and I am proud that he has referred to me publicly as a friend. I cling to the hope that this draconian commercial assault on Canada, which will be promptly replied to in terms that will discomfort millions of Americans – one assumes nobody in the administration is confusing Canada with Panama or Greenland – is a negotiating tactic from a skilled and experienced dealmaker.

The sooner the United States reverses this poisoning of Canada-US relations to an extent that has had no precedent in more than 150 years, the better for both countries and the West. I embrace this hope with the tenacity of a Canadian who cares about his country and who is pro-American despite having been persecuted half-to-death there and who is the only person who has written more than two million literate and favorable words about Donald Trump over the last nine years. Let's deescalate this now.

First published in the [New York Sun](#)