

Time to toughen up, Canada

By Conrad Black

Those of us who confidently stated that in waving about 25 per cent tariffs against Canadian goods, U.S. President Donald Trump was just playing poker and raising the ante, appear to have been vindicated. Those who were preparing for guerrilla war, such as the Toronto Star editorial board and the worrisomely incoherent and oddly malicious Andrew Coyne, have been left to self-sedate in a quiet place and return to normal



U.S. President Donald Trump PHOTO BY EVAN VUCCI/AP PHOTO

life when they are ready, without rushing it or being over-ambitious. It was outrageous, as I and others have written, for the U.S. government to treat Mexico and Canada alike. As our capable ambassador to

the United Nations, Bob Rae, pointed out on Fox News, when tourism and investment are taken into account, our trade relationship provides huge benefits for both Canada and the United States. And whatever grievances the Americans may think they have over the entry of undesirable people and dangerous drugs into their country across the northern border, we have at least as great a grievance over the flow of illegal firearms and migrants, who have fled across our border in fear of the new president's threats to deport them. The United States has acknowledged that the flow of fentanyl from Mexico

to the U.S. is nearly 500 times greater than the quantity that has come from Canada.

All of this is essentially nonsense, because it is up to each sovereign country to put whatever controls it judges appropriate on its own border. The United States and Canada are free countries that do not restrain people from leaving. One of the principal reasons for President Trump's re-election was his predecessor's insane decision not to take security at the southern border seriously, which allowed millions of illegal migrants to stream into the country. The number of people entering the U.S. illegally across southern border is orders of magnitude greater than those coming across the northern border; and where Mexico and China had been collaborating to entice manufacturing out of the United States and replace it with cheap labour fabrication and sell products back to the United States under the cover of the North American free-trade agreement, Canada has been a fair trading country throughout. It is no concern of ours that Trump has chosen to put Mexico and China in their place, but treating Canada as he did was unjust and seriously annoying.

Part of our problem has been Canadian sensitivity: we have, as a country, been so circumspect in our behaviour that we are not accustomed to disapproval. President Trump told me months ago that Canada had nothing to fear from the United States other than that, "Your trade negotiators are better than ours and we need to put that right." Only a trade wonk could know if that is true, but if it is, the answer is not to wave tariffs around like six guns. Precisely because Canada is such a well house-trained country, we are acutely discomforted by aggressive treatment, particularly from a country we know as well as the United States. Not since French President Charles de Gaulle, on a state visit in 1967 to celebrate the centenary of the Confederation of Canada, took the opportunity to urge Quebec to secede from Confederation have we had such a great and legitimate grievance against the conduct towards us of a

great power. On that occasion in 1967, we were for the first time left all alone to deal with what was a genuine, as well as an extremely provoking, challenge from the man who was then, along with Mao Zedong, the most eminent statesmen in the world, and one revered by the French-speaking population of this country. He said his reception in Quebec had reminded him of the liberation of France, as if the Canadian Army had not landed at Juno beach on D-Day as liberators.

Americans, and citizens of other countries that have been more assertive in more contentious areas than Canada, are accustomed to having their flags burned in public and their embassies attacked. In some respects, we suffer from being too gentle a country. My friend Frank Buckley, a distinguished public intellectual from Saskatchewan, when he moved to the United States about 20 years ago to take up an important academic posting, said: "I'm leaving the best country in the world to go to the greatest country in the world, but they are both great countries and they are both good countries." These things are to some extent a matter of taste but that is a very defensible statement and we should keep it in mind and not jeer at each other's national anthems or otherwise pillory our neighbouring country, with which we have had an almost untroubled relationship for over 200 years. No sane Canadian (or American) would have wished to change places with Poland or Korea in the last two centuries. The most positive development to come from the tariff controversy is the flickering of patriotism that has occurred in this country and which, if followed up seriously, could assist us into growing fully into the psychology of a G7 country of worldwide importance. We should have at least three times the defence capability that we do. There is no more stimulative spending than on the high technology requirements of the military, no more efficient centre of mature higher education than the Armed Forces and no more readily available method of training up unemployed people. If we tripled our commitment in this area, we would rapidly discover we have three times the influence and credibility in the world than we have now, not because we would become warmongers, but because we would have greater influence within the western alliance and assist in building the deterrent capability of the democratic countries.

We must also abandon the green terror and the tax-and-spend policies of the Trudeau-Freeland negative economic miracle of comparative stagnation and loss of relative per capita prosperity, ramp up our oil and gas export and refinement capabilities as quickly as possible and comprehensively incentivize investment. I am one of that endangered minority who would favour increasing our commitment to public broadcasting and to the national film industry, as long as quality improved, in order to strengthen Canada's international standing in those fields and, by constructive means, keeping as much of that talent as we can here rather than in Los Angeles, London or Paris. We should also look seriously at taking over American automobile production in this country and turning one of the European automobile manufacturers into a binational joint venture with this country. If Sweden and South Korea can have their own automobile industry, so can we. One topical matter we could approach is that of Greenland. Its population has the most in common with the population of Canada's nearby Baffin Island. As part of an undertaking to pull our weight in the defence of the Arctic, in addition to reviving former prime minister Brian Mulroney's plan to purchase 10 nuclear submarines and former prime minister Stephen Harper's yet unrealized goal of building the super-icebreaker CCGS John G Diefenbaker, we could promote a closer association with the population of Greenland. Governor General Mary Simon, given her ethnicity and service as ambassador to Denmark, could play an important role in this. The negotiations with the Americans won't be so painful. Let's take this chance to flex benign muscles that we have shown no recognition that we have. The world is waiting for us.

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