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"Whatever Happened to Canada?"

The world sees a lack of leadership in Canadian foreign policy.

David N. Biette

Canada Among Nations 2005: Split Images
Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands, editors
McGill-Queen's University Press
295 pages, softcover
ISBN 0773530274

In the Canadian Interest? Assessing Canada's International Policy Statement
David J. Bercuson and Denis Stairs, editors
Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute
107 pages, PDF
<www.cdfai.org/PDF/InTheCanadianInterestE.pdf>

Recently an older acquaintance of mine, aware that I worked on Canadian issues, asked me, "What ever happened to Canada? We used to hear so much about what Canada did around the world and now we don't hear anything."

I don't recall exactly how I responded to the question. There is no easy answer but, instead, a long set of explanations that point to the recent crisis in the direction of Canadian foreign policy. Though not necessarily the subject of media attention outside Canada, Canadian self-reflection on foreign policy, identity and Canada's role in the world has been ongoing for many years, with an extended formal review culminating, in part, with last year's International Policy Statement (henceforth the IPS) that the Martin government laboured so long to put out. Articles and publications, conferences and dialogue on foreign policy invariably devolved into a plaintive examination of national identity: that Canada could not possibly put forward its goals toward the rest of the world unless and until it defined itself as a society first. At the same time, the conduct of Canada's foreign policy drifted, presumably guided by superior Canadian "values" and, clearly in many cases, by public opinion. The lack of leadership in foreign policy, if not apparent in Canada, was certainly observed outside the country.

It would be easy if global problems were predictable, if all of Canada read from the same page about Canadian objectives in the world and if past glories guided current practice. But the world has changed and so has Canada. The end of the Cold War has shifted alliances; the United States emerged as the only superpower. Threats now come from private actors as well as from state actors. Globalization and the explosion of communications technologies have made the world a smaller place, calling for new methods of dealing with these new challenges.

It would also certainly be easier in the minds of many Canadians if the United States did not complicate things so.

Two collections published late last year focus on Canada's foreign policy and the IPS. *Split Images*, edited by Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands, is the 21st consecutive instalment of the *Canada Among Nations* series, produced by the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, this year in cooperation with the Centre for International Governance Innovation. *In the Canadian Interest? Assessing Canada's International Policy Statement,* published by the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute and edited by David Bercuson and Denis Stairs, dissects many aspects of the IPS, the Defence Policy Statement, and Canadian foreign policy in general. Each collection offers 15 articles; *Split Images* presents a wider debate on the challenges confronting Canadian foreign policy than does *In the Canadian Interest,* whose very focused and quite critical articles conclude with a set of 60 recommendations.

If common threads can be pulled from these two collections, they are that the world has changed since the end of the Cold War; Canadian foreign policy has drifted for a decade; the debate over "values versus interests" continues; Canadian identity remains in flux; the IPS is headed in the right direction, if naive and ill conceived in many places; Canada cannot afford to do what it desires—or what it needs to do; and the United States is either a curse on Canadian decision making or a valuable partner in a variety of areas.

All the essayists emphasize that the world has changed since the end of the Cold War, and they are right. The glory days of 1945 to 1989, when Canada seemed to make a place for itself and was welcomed on the world stage, when prominent Canadians excelled in the exercise of diplomacy, are now history. The decline in Canada's global influence and its foreign policy drift are well described by Andrew Cohen in his 2003 book *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World.* Among the authors of the collections under review, Andy Knight offers several excuses for Canada's drift in his article in *Split Images.* If Canada seems to have lost its way in the world, says Knight, "it is because that 'world' is in the midst of turbulence and transition. Shifts in Canada's international policy today are reflective of the uncertainty associated with world order transformation and the concomitant reconceptualization, or reshaping of multilateralism." Well, obviously! Is it not the job of the foreign policy establishment to anticipate and keep up with the changes and adapt to circumstances? While foreign policy can anticipate a world that is desired, it also must focus on the world at hand. Thus much of the conduct of foreign policy is necessarily reactive. And when Canada has to rely on others for the conduct of its foreign policy (overseas intelligence gathering and analysis, for example, or strategic lifts to deploy Canadian forces and development aid), it is not in a position to call the shots as it might otherwise be. Several of the authors suggest that foreign policy must reflect first what is real, rather than what might be desired.

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Today Canadians enjoy "an unparalleled measure of 'free security'" because the threats come from outside, "where only the United States can project effective force."[1] With minimal contributions to its own defence, or North American defence on a larger scale, Canada has essentially had a low-cost—some would say a free—ride and could devote spending to domestic social programs that otherwise might have been spent on national, continental or global security. Canada has been safe in this position because it knows that the United States will defend Canada and the

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North American space whether Canada wants it or not, thus guaranteeing the northern nation's security and prosperity.

David Bercuson, co-editor of *In the Canadian Interest*, comments that following drastic cuts in defence and foreign policy assets in the 1980s and 1990s, Canada's contribution to a "new world order" was to be "idea-based, via treaties, tribunals and fervent rhetoric about human (as opposed to national) security." Thus, he says, "fewer assets would be needed in a world where reason alone might prevail. Canada's diplomatic, development, and defence assets were allowed to rot from the inside just as Canada's international finger wagging grew more frenetic."

The foreign policy review leading up to the IPS was long overdue. Previous statements talked about promoting values, essentially ignoring interests, and the exercise leading up to the 2005 IPS was a tortured journey in which the prime minister brought in an outsider, Jennifer Welsh (who opens the *Split Images* book), to craft the piece. While rationalizing intelligently the "interests versus values" debate, Welsh does agree that many of the values Canada promotes abroad are values Canada shares with the United States, including democracy, the rule of law, human rights and an enhanced role for the private sector in development. Derek Burney in *In the Canadian Interest* remarks that the "somewhat sentimental attitude about our place in the world" is not preparing Canadians for the complexities of globalization or the threats to Canada's economic well-being."

The new prime minister seems more focused as he takes the reins of government, though none of Stephen Harper's five points concern foreign policy; he has, however, been heard to imply that a sixth is improving relations with the United States, something he is likely to have more success with than his immediate predecessors.

Bercuson expresses a sense of relief that the IPS says policy is to be guided by "interests." (How, in a liberal democracy, could it be otherwise? he asks.)

About half of *In the Canadian Interest* is devoted to defence issues; George Macdonald's comments on the Defence Policy Statement, which focuses on domestic security issues and the obligation of the government to protect Canada and Canadians, discuss the Canada Command and the need for Canadians to understand that Canadian soil is considered a theatre of operations. James Fergusson argues that Canada Command is not just national, but is a command for Canada in all of North America. Additionally, domestic security in Canada has implications for mutual Canada-U.S. security and the Canada-U.S. relationship. Fergusson also says that a coordinated crisis response on a north-south axis is more practical than east-west. He notes that the ballistic missile defence decision created uncertainty, particularly in the United States, about the direction of Canadian foreign policy.

Joseph Jockel and Joel Sokolsky write in *Split Images* that "Ottawa cannot adopt positions that pander to anti-American sentiment in Canada by openly challenging U.S. policies overseas and expect to maintain Washington's trust and confidence in Canada as a reliable partner in terms of helping to secure the American homeland."

Much of the foreign policy debate in Canada revolves around what kind of relationship, if any, Canadians want to have with the United States. Most authors in the two collections agree that Canada's relationship with the United States is, like it or not, the most important relationship Canada has. The bilateral relationship should never be taken for granted. Burney, whose experience with the United States is long and deep, says it "requires dedicated, high-level effort and should be the prime minister's over-riding foreign policy priority." At the same time, he acknowledges that such focus has limited popular support at home. As noted in the introduction to *In the Canadian Interest*, the Canada-U.S. relationship is loaded with politics and is electorally inconvenient in Canada.

Canadian policy in the global context is driven less by necessity than by preference; this is not true of Canada-U.S. relations. Appropriate policy toward the United States is an imperative, despite the relative paucity of attention given to this relationship in the IPS compared to other areas of the world. Canadian foreign policy needs to engage the United States, not construct ill-suited mechanisms for the sole purpose of tying down American power. While emotionally satisfying to some, such policies avoid tackling "the problem."

Being different from the United States for the sake of being different is irresponsible and an abdication of the national interest.

It must be remembered that acknowledging importance does not imply agreement—far from it. If Canada's relationship with the United States is indeed its most important foreign relationship (argued by some in each collection, questioned in *Split Images*), it does not necessarily follow that this is Canada's only foreign relationship, nor is the United States/rest-of-the-world dynamic a zero-sum game. The Bush administration has certainly not been popular with the vast majority of Canadians, and the Chrétien and Martin governments made a point of letting the public—as well as Americans and the global community—know how distasteful they found much of recent American foreign policy. The new Harper government has carefully said that the United States is a friend to Canada, notably in the remarkably concise throne speech in early April.

Being different from the United States for the sake of being different is irresponsible and an abdication of the national interest. Letting foreign policy be driven by public opinion (particularly when public opinion is an emotional reaction to whatever George W. Bush does) shows a lack of leadership. This was particularly evident in the debate over Canada's potential participation in ballistic missile defence, something the government had requested before it let the public opinion tail wag the foreign policy dog. If the government changes policies at the whims of public opinion, how reliably will Canada be viewed?

The challenge for Canada is to balance very carefully a constructive relationship with the United States with the desire of Canadians to have a distinct role in global affairs. I agree with Derek Burney here: these two goals are not mutually exclusive, and Canada can often have greater influence in global affairs when it is perceived as having a position of respect or privilege in Washington. By being different for the sake of being different, Canada has let itself become irrelevant in Washington, a situation, notes Burney, where Canadians perversely see that being peripheral in Washington implies a sort of independence from the Americans.

The United States, however, should not serve as the only reliable market for Canadian trade, commercial activity and investment. Canada needs to have a diversity of trading partners; it is not either-or, and should not be at the expense of a generally exceptional relationship with the United States.

Split Images offers several chapters on other global opportunities for Canada, particularly with Brazil, Russia, India and China. Each country, in its own way, deserves respect and should be treated as an equal. "There is no room for positions of moral superiority," as Annette Hester says in her chapter on Brazil. New links with each of these countries would strengthen multilateral organizations (such as the Organization of American States) and give Canada a much desired greater independence from the United States. Bogdan Burudu and Drago Popa in their chapter on Russia ask whether, in a unipolar world, Canada can achieve more on its own with Russia, or alongside the United States as a partner (on the other hand, Reid Morden in *In the Canadian Interest?* criticizes the IPS overtures toward Russia as "disingenuous fluff" not worthy of comment). Ramesh Kumar and Nigmendra Narain argue that Canada has been too cautious in responding to opportunities in the Indian economy; they argue, too, that Canada needs to accept India as a nuclear power and work with it as an equal. Canada needs to be cautious with China, according to Paul Evans, since on a variety of issues (human rights and environmental issues, for example) Canadian and Chinese views diverge.

George Haynal offers a concise yet comprehensive chapter on Mexico in *In the Canadian Interest* and questions why Mexico has not been the focus of Canadian immigration, defence and business cooperation programs. He points out, quite aptly, the ever more influential role Mexican Americans will play in American life, something Canadians should pay close attention to. Curiously, though, neither collection takes on the concept of North America.

The IPS states frankly that there is only so much that Canada, as one nation, can accomplish. Kim Richard Nossal in *In the Canadian Interest,* calls the IPS's "Responsibilities Agenda" dishonest since Canadians and their government have "neither the means nor the will to make much more than the smallest dent" in the ills of the world, and asks the government to be more honest with Canadians and the international community about where it can actually make a difference.

There are clear trade-offs to be made and it is plain that Canada can no longer do foreign policy on the cheap. Short-term bursts of activity will not get the job done. Morden asks whether Canada has, or will have, the wherewithal in money, people and interests to pursue the "conceit" of the far-reaching IPS. He says, "the modest replenishment of foreign policy assets posited in the IPS will not even begin to re-establish

Canada's standing or engagement in the multitude of issues and places where we will supposedly be working with renewed and enhanced fervour."

If *Split Images* is more hopeful, *In the Canadian Interest* is pessimistic. The latter volume presents a blunt critique of all aspects of the IPS that, like other policy reviews, allows new prime ministers to distance themselves from predecessors. *In the Canadian Interest* does not pretend to offer a broad spectrum of national views on foreign policy. The six chapters on defence are very specific. Among those authors not already mentioned, Rob Huebert discusses whether failed states are really the core threat to Canada. Jack Granatstein gives a serious analysis of nearly every aspect of the Canadian Forces; his recommendation for Parliamentary approval for overseas deployment of the Canadian Forces echoes the chapter in *Split Images* by Gerald Schmitz and James Lee, who argue quite strongly for a greater role for Parliament in foreign policy and defence policy development.

Split Images often veers into the "if only we didn't have to deal with the United States" mode; Canada does not seem ready, as Australia was, to make the United States a focus of its foreign policy, as described by Nossal in *Split Images*. Louis Bélanger questions the reconceptualization of trade policy to a more domestically oriented "international commerce" policy, and argues that Canada should "build on its national interest as the more open of the major economies to develop a real comprehensive and strategic trade policy." Tom Axworthy looks at the IPS in the context of the changes seen in the Canadian foreign policy establishment and, in one of the few outright recommendations in *Split Images*, advocates that public diplomacy must be a central tool in modern foreign policy.

What the new Conservative government will carry forward remains an open question and another national debate on foreign policy seems unlikely in the short run. The Harper government has made overtures to the United States and perhaps an effort will be made to get a better understanding about how U.S. policy is formed, who makes it, who influences it and how it plays out, not only for the government and the civil service, but scholars, too: Daniel Drache, for example, while close to brilliant in his analysis of the Canadian scene in his chapter in *Split Images*, misses the mark completely when he talks about the United States.

By engaging with the United States and opportunities elsewhere, Canada can begin to have its cake and eat it too. Canadian foreign policy needs realistic direction, strong leadership from the top, discernment and the moral and financial support of Canadians to get the job done. Taken together, *Split Images* and *In the Canadian Interest* may help inform the next policy debate.

Note

1 Robert Kagan (2002), "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, No. 113, June and July <www.policyreview.org/JUN02/kagan.html>. Kagan notes that the Cold War by necessity required Europeans—and Canadians, I will add—to make a major contribution to their own defence.