**Canadian Pugwash Group and Science for Peace**
***Eric Fawcett Memorial Forum***
**Saturday, April 17, 2004**
**"Development of Canadian Policy in the Shadow of U.S. Defence and Foreign Policy"**

# Power of the Weak? Canada's Diplomacy and the Bush Doctrine

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In 1968, Stephen Clarkson and a group of concerned Canadian scholars published a book entitled *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada?,* examining the constraints imposed on Ottawa's policy-choices by its relationship with the United States. Written against the backdrop of the Vietnam war, NATO's nuclear doctrine, the BOMARC crisis in Canada, and U.S. interference in domestic politics, it asked the questions on everyone's mind: did Canada have any choice in mapping out its own foreign and defence policy; could it have stayed out of anti-communist military alliances; could it have been less aligned and, in a word, more Canadian? However, in the context of the black and white world of the Cold War, the limits of the possible were set by Uncle Sam. So Canada confined its foreign policy initiatives to quiet diplomacy with the U.S. and multilateral action at the UN to mitigate the weight of U.S. power and offset the deepening continental integration. Such was the reality of living in the shadow of the colossus, as Mexicans used to say, because one of the world's superpowers happened to be Canada's closest neighbour and largest trading partner.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. emerged from the Cold War as the *only* superpower. Yet this did not present an obstacle to our foreign policy: the days of external constraints were behind us.

DFAIT articulated in 1995 Canada's foreign policy as being built on three pillars—prosperity, security, and projecting Canadian values abroad. In the same period, Foreign Minister Axworthy defined an ambitious human security agenda for the country and increased Canada's activity on the world stage with such initiatives as the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, International Criminal Court, and UN reform.

The global environment overall was supportive of Canada's liberal internationalism. The UN came out of deep freeze and the great veto-holding powers cooperated on humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping, cleaning up the 'small messes' left by the Cold War. The end of bipolarity meant that we could focus on sustainable development, arms control, and human rights, best exemplified by the UN's *Agenda for Peace* and the *Millennium Goals* for development. There was even an ideological unity with the Clinton administration.

Then September 11, 2001, happened, recasting the world, once again, into two poles: the U.S. pole and, judging by the "you're-with-us-or-against-us" rhetoric, the terrorist pole.

Today I would like to focus on the implications of the credos of the new U.S. National Security Strategy for Canada's policy autonomy and policy options, because the Bush Doctrine has forced another generation of Canadians to ask once again whether an

independent foreign policy is even possible. Given Canada's trade dependence on the United States, can we afford to stay out of Iraq? Out of national missile defence?

I would like to address these fundamental questions in the context of the recent developments and look at the new limits of the possible for Canada:

- In *real* terms: what can we do given our capacity?
- In *relative* terms: what can we do compared to other middle powers?
- In *normative* terms: what we should do; where are our strengths; where do our interests and values coincide?
- What it will *cost* us, directly and indirectly (through the impact on trade)?
- Finally, what kind of domestic policy consensus and internal coordination is required?—since, in a way, "the debate with the United States is a proxy for the debate over our own *domestic* policy future."

## I. Canada and the Bush Doctrine

Nowhere was the impact of the tremendous configuration of world politics since 9/11 after the *paradigm shift* in the United States more strongly felt than in its immediate neighbours in North America. This is what Prof. Stephen Clarkson and I have examined over the last two years, when we identified several phases in the national security policy:

- *Prevention*: homeland security and continental defence;
- *Retribution*: diplomatically-sanctioned war on terrorism in Afghanistan;
- *Pre-emption*: the unilateralist Bush Doctrine (war to achieve regime change in Iraq).

There was a clear pattern: U.S. unilateral actions forced Canada into a reactive mode, as great pressure was exerted to conform to U.S. security, defence, and immigration policy. Ottawa bolstered its counter-terrorism measures; *quietly* furthered military integration on the continent; sent troops to Afghanistan and indirectly contributed to the U.S. war on Iraq; and then, in a most controversial decision, stayed out of Operation *"Iraqi Freedom*."

The federal government felt that by meeting Washington's security concerns, it would forestall U.S. unilateral, punitive actions and avert another border shutdown. Because of Canada's dependence on U.S. trade, with almost 90% of our exports going south, it was not al-Qaeda terrorism that the government feared but further trade blockages. And we also expected economic favours in return. But favours were not forthcoming: the Canadian contribution to the U.S. war on terror was met with higher U.S. duties on BC lumber and prairie wheat.

This tension in Canadian policy priorities came out most clearly one year ago at the UN Security Council, when Canada put forward a compromise resolution over Iraq and worked closely with our third NAFTA partner, Mexico, as well as Chile, to avert war (both countries had a seat on the Security Council). Its neighbours' unhelpful meddling only angered the Bush administration. We only suspected then what we know now: the U.S. decision to force Saddam Hussein out had been made much earlier; the Canadian proposal never really had a chance.

But the entire episode is noteworthy. It showed there was a line Ottawa would not cross to appease its demanding neighbour—against its own public's wishes: it was drawn at the Bush Doctrine in Iraq. Jean Chrétien's decision did not go unnoticed: it was reported in foreign media; in drew the scorn of the neo-conservative establishment in the U.S. and Ambassador Cellucci's rebuke; and, more disturbingly, it came under fire from domestic critics. The Canadian Right and the business community clamoured for Canada's military participation, fearing the effects on our trade.

And so Paul Heinbecker's diplomatic triumph was short-lived. Exaggerated fears of U.S. economic retaliation placed Ottawa under such political and corporate pressure that, after its declaration of temporary independence, it quickly engaged in fence-mending efforts. The government opened talks on NMD in May 2003 and announced a $100-million contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq, which was soon followed by another $200 million.

Canadians who took Cellucci's rebuke as a threat did not notice that the same stern message was delivered to other non-participants from Brazilia to Berlin. Of course, when we use the examples of Brazil's or Europe's policies, we are told to keep in mind Canada's unique position of living next door to the hegemon—and consequently its much higher degree of economic dependence and vulnerability.

**<u>Conclusions</u>**

***1. Canada's policy autonomy***

Thus, realistically speaking, given Washington's assertive unilateralism and our dependence on U.S. trade, did Canada have the power to sustain its own policy choice after 9/11 and Iraq?

The answer is *yes*.

First, there is historic precedent. Public disagreement with U.S. policies has occurred over NORAD, NATO, Vietnam, Cuba, and Sudan. This should have told Canadians that "agreeing to disagree" has always been an acceptable policy choice. As David Malone notes, Canada worked actively to undermine the U.S. policy in Vietnam, yet not on Iraq. Instead, we agonized how this would affect trade.

Second, and more important, disagreement does not entail *retribution*. We seem to be forgetting the reality of NAFTA that has tied the two countries into a deeply *interdependent* relationship. Interdependence is mutual dependence: there are definite limits on the weaker player's ability to define its policies *but* there are also definite constraints on the hegemon's freedom to hand out unilateral punishments for Canada's irritating behaviour. Our symbiotic economic relationship in North America obliges Washington to tolerate its neighbours' policy autonomy.

Why did we miss this point? We should have only looked as far as Mexico to see the *power of the weak* at work.

For years Mexico chose not to stand for election to the UN Security Council in order to avoid contradicting U.S. preferences. In effect, it practiced "pragmatic autonomy.' But this changed with NAFTA, when Mexico recognized its strength: Mexicans know that the size and economic significance of the trade flowing between the two countries today makes unilateral, punishing action by the United States impossible to sustain: "The border no longer belongs only to the United States; it is a shared wall."

Could the U.S. close down the Mexican border? Absolutely—in the name of counterterrorism, the new Department of Homeland Security has that authority and capability. But in the U.S.-Mexico relations, notes a National Security Archives file, "Any attempt by the United States to punish or castigate Mexico that resulted in real harm to the Mexican economy would automatically lead to collateral damage to the U.S. economy in turn. Viewed in that light, the fears expressed in countless editorial and opinion pieces in the Mexican press as Fox equivocated over how to vote in the United Nations on the war in Iraq were anachronistic, out of synch with the realities of U.S.-Mexican interdependence today."

The same holds true for Canada, and even more so, given the sheer $645-billion in trade. Yet our business community and the right-wing critics failed to see this. The only time the U.S. would "make the border relevant again" for Canada is if we were reckless with our security—which clearly was not the case.

Despite all these pressures to converge, though weaker and poorer, Mexico showed more autonomy than Canada, which followed in lockstep every shift in the U.S. policy until late 2002—and then only to backtrack in the spring.

2. **Capacity for independent policymaking**

So, our policy can be at odds with the Bush White House. And polls indicate that Canadians want Canada to play a bigger role in the world; they also want policy independence from the U.S.

But an independent foreign policy is not cost-free. By this, I do not mean the indirect cost of U.S. displeasure or trade retaliation but the cost of having the capacity to conduct *effective* and *principled* diplomacy by putting our money where our mouth is.

Thus far, we have not been willing to pay the price: the decision to cut the foreign, defence, and aid budgets in the 1990s made by Jean Chrétien as Prime Minister and Paul Martin as Finance Minister was *incompatible* with being an independent player on the world stage. But these were *our* choices, made by a government bent on reversing fiscal deficit. And only we can reverse them.

3. ***Need for public debate and role of interest groups***

As with all political choices in a democracy, they are made with an eye to the pulse of the nation and opinion polls. The Prime Minister's decision not to join the Americans in Iraq is

a good example: it was a split vote in English Canada and an overwhelming opposition to war in Quebec (gearing up for a provincial election) that made up the government's mind. It was *politics not principles*.

Thus, when the public can articulate its policy preference, it can receive a hearing. Currently, polls reveal that Canadians [1] overwhelmingly oppose Star Wars; [2] strongly support peacekeeping and conflict resolution not combat alongside U.S. forces; and [3] support our own environmental health and safety standards *even* if this reduces trade with the U.S.

Yet public opinion on these issues is still too diffused, unarticulated, and muted to influence Ottawa's policy. There needs to be more public debate on such matters of grave importance for the future as NMD—on which Ottawa has never asked for public input. Thus, if the impetus does not come from above, it has to *come from below*: this is why the civil society has a critical role to play in generating public awareness and focusing attention on these issues.

4. ***Need for international cooperation***
But the reality is that—even with [1] re-investment in our foreign policy tools *and* with [2] public support—we still lack sufficient economic and political clout to compel change and therefore we must act in concert with other like-minded countries.

First, in North America—where we have to recall that another country also shares the predicament of having the global hegemon for a neighbour: Mexico. The attacks of 9/11 drove Canada and Mexico to recognize that they "[shared] important interests and branding problems *vis-à-vis* the United States, and should therefore work on strengthening their relationship," but this recognition was not followed up with joint action. Even though the same blueprint was used for the two U.S. Smart Border plans with Canada and Mexico, there was no direct Can-Mex discussion or trilateral coordination of counter-terrorism.

The problem is that the two peripheries prefer not to deal with the United States at the same table: Canadians feel a one-on-one approach will maintain our *special relationship* with Washington. But this is short-sighted thinking, which only perpetuates the model of *hub-and-spoke* bilateral relations that Canada has historically sought to avoid and which makes every one of the spokes more vulnerable to U.S. whims.

The essence of the power of the weak lies in their unity and coordination. The example of Canadian-Chilean-Mexican collaboration at the UN in the winter of 2003 should be the *rule not the exception*. There is definite potential for cooperation. Given Mexico's and Canada's similar diplomatic strategies, this bilateral dyad could become an important complement to their U.S. relationship. As an example, together Canada and Mexico comprise over 36% of U.S. exports and 26% of its hydrocarbon needs. I am not suggesting they gang up on the United States, but merely recognize they are not powerless. They should take advantage of their considerable joint bargaining power.

Outside North America, the Bush Doctrine of aggressive global unilateralism has also been unacceptable to most of Canada's traditional partners in the EU, the G20, and the OAS. We should harness the power of numbers.

5. ***The nature of (U.S.) power in the global system***
But what is the purpose of investing our energy into all this international coordination if the Bush White House does not seem to care much for the "international community"?

The truth is, the U.S. can't "go it alone." The neo-realists are being unrealistic to suggest otherwise.

There are many areas where it needs Canada and Co. We see this in the global economy, where power is more evenly balanced between Europe and the U.S., with Canada, Brazil and other countries playing a major role. We also see it in what Kofi Annan has called "problems without passports"—proliferation of WMD, degradation of our common environment, contagious disease, and mass displacement, to name a few. Most importantly, given the current U.S. preoccupation with terrorism, this holds true for Global Security, where, without allies, the U.S. Empire would have no clothes.

American analysts are increasingly coming to recognize that the United States cannot win the War on Terror on its own. Despite its astounding military budget, the U.S. is not self-sufficient. Why was Washington insisting on Canada's contribution in Iraq? Two reasons: Canada's and its allies' military contribution was critical to the coalition's success; and, international support garners domestic legitimacy for the Bush government. Even Robert Kagan observed that the United States would otherwise face a crisis of legitimacy.

Second, if allies are important in the military arm of the war on terror, they are vital in the support activities: there are certain things that U.S. cannot do—or cannot do well. Americans know how to bomb from high altitudes or win staggering military victories—but Afghanistan and Iraq have yet again confirmed that they cannot adequately deal with the aftermath of war: peace-building and nation-building efforts—from training of police forces and judicial reform to the creation of civil society. This has been the middle-powers' *métier*, which President Bush's appeal for UN's help in post-war reconstruction has confirmed.

6. ***Importance of an independent Canadian foreign policy***
Thus, there is a role for Canada, and we *can* play it. The question is, *should we*? Would it not be easier to sign on to whatever worldview Washington holds and so boost our exports?

That depends on the perspective, of course: do we conceive of our foreign policy as an extension of our trade policy or do we think of it as part of the Canadian identity and value system that goes beyond the simple calculus of profit-making.

In making this decision, we should keep in mind several points:

First, toeing the U.S. line is not going to help us on softwood lumber, Saskatchewan blueberries, or PEI potatoes. Second, a middle-power with a recurring identity crisis needs a distinctive foreign policy. Third, as the French Premier noted, the advent of the Bush

administration presented us with two competing visions of the world: a unilateralist, neo-realist, neo-conservative one in the United States vs. a multilateralist, liberal internationalist one in much of the West. Canada must ensure that our misguided economic pragmatism does not cast aside Canada's diplomatic traditions.

This is as much about our *values* as *interest*. If we are seen as an echo of the U.S. voice, we will lose much of the goodwill in the world that is generally associated with Canada—that we have earned for policies that helped bridge the East-West and then the North-South divide. There is tremendous opportunity cost associated with trying to "get closer under the U.S. umbrella."

There is already some evidence that we are losing that reputation in several areas where Canada used to play a positive and an independent role from the U.S., including [1] access to drugs, [2] food security and [3] protection of the environment. We are now seen to be driven by economic self-interest. We are *speaking for* the United States and blocking multinational consensus on the global commons. Our recent record thus prompted one Asian delegate to ask what has happened to Canada's "positive influence."

The cause? Some of these changes can be traced to our relationship with the United States, to our over-eagerness to please Washington. But we should not blame the Bush Doctrine. Much of our decline has been of our own making: the fact that we have allowed trade concerns to drive our entire foreign policy agenda.

7. **Structural issues in Canadian foreign policymaking**

There clearly needs to be more internal coordination. But there is a basic *structural* issue in Canadian foreign policy in the way the government is institutionalized. There are two opposing tendencies: the integrationists, focused on trade, and the internationalists, concerned with the bigger picture. The latter group, where most CSOs also belong, is structurally weak—it is on the outside of the decision-making processes, which has contributed to the relative dominance of trade over humanitarianism. But weakness is not a reason not to press its views: the government will have to listen if accosted.

h. ***Our foreign policy focus***

Given the internal and external constraints on Canadian policy agenda and scarce resources, we will have to focus on several key manageable priorities in our policy. As for our Can-Am relations, Canada can and should disagree when needed, but, when it does, it should *disagree agreeably*.

***9. Our vision of Canada***

In the end, yes, we *are* faced with the predicament of a neo-realist administration in Washington whose beliefs, values, and practices have sharply contradicted our own and whose penchant for assertive unilateralism and retaliation has made us vulnerable.

But we are neither hapless nor powerless. We can co-exist politically and economically with the United States and still sustain an independent policy agenda. This requires a clear vision of Canada's role in the world. We must reject the "limitationist conception of middle power," which stresses more our international constraints than the opportunities for creative statecraft. There is much we can and should do—without risking the U.S. ire.

It is remarkable that 35 years after Stephen Clarkson's original title, we are yet again asking whether we can have an independent foreign policy and that our government is so profoundly out of touch with the public opinion. Even more astonishing is that recent talks and conferences on this subject have reached the same conclusions as in 1968: whether we can succeed in developing our policy in the shadow of the Bush Doctrine is, once again, largely in our hands.