

*A Middle Power on the World Stage:
Canadian Grand Strategy in the Twentieth Century*

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming. Before I say another word, I'd like to thank David Bercuson for this great honor to be here today and Nancy Pearson Mackey for all the hard work that she has done to help me get here. I'd like to begin with three quick caveats. The first, as I reminded David when he invited me to give this lecture, is that I am not an historian of Canada. David seemed to think that my lack of formal training in this field would not pose an insurmountable obstacle to my delivering such a distinguished lecture in Canadian history, and I am putting my faith and trust in him that this is in fact so. It is not my intention here today to tell Canadians anything about their own history that they do not know. It is instead to perform the task David has given me: to place the history of Canada at war in the 20th century into a wider context and to train an outsider's eye onto the problems of Canada and its approach to war and strategy.

The second caveat is that I am stepping a bit outside my comfort zone here this afternoon on another level as well. Most of my published work has been on the First World War, but I have decided not to make the war the topic of my talk here tonight. The reason is that last year this lecture was given by my friend Tim Cook and there is nothing I can say about Canada in the First World War that Tim could not say much

better. Thus I thought it best to leave that field to him and instead take a wider view of Canadian approaches to grand strategy throughout the 20th century.

The final caveat is rather more pleasant to discuss in a setting such as this one, and that is my long-standing admiration for Canada. I have been coming to Canada regularly since I was about ten years old. My father saw the efforts of Canadian diplomats to rescue Americans in Tehran in 1979 and decided he'd take his family to Ontario for its next vacation. I don't think he has been back too often since, but I certainly have for both business and pleasure. My wife and I have many good friends across Canada, and I have had the pleasure of attending several academic conferences here. I also had the distinct honor of helping to lead a University of New Brunswick staff ride of Canadian officers through Sicily and southern Italy. So I may not be your typical American in regards to Canada, and I humbly hope that you will accept my remarks today in the friendly and respectful manner in which I offer them. And with those matters out of the way, let me begin.

In his recent book, *Masters and Commanders*, on Allied grand strategy in World War II, British historian Andrew Roberts observed that

It is surprising how little influence Canadians enjoyed in the higher direction of the Second World War. They had the world's third largest navy at one point, pushed furthest inland of any of the armies on D-Day, were fabulously generous to British coffers throughout the war, contributing much more than the Americans per capita, and provided the only two armed and trained divisions standing between the south coast and London after Dunkirk. Yet they had virtually no say on the various bodies that ultimately decided how, when and where Canadians would fight.

For this absence of a Canadian voice in Allied strategy, Roberts blamed the instinctive and reflexive willingness – even the eagerness – of Canadians to take a back seat to their more powerful British and American allies. A more assertive prime minister than Mackenzie King, Roberts argued, “could probably have secured a better deal for Canada in particular and the British Dominions in general.”¹ King had not

¹ Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp. 273 and 449.

objected when Churchill and Roosevelt failed to extend him an invitation to attend the Placentia Bay meeting off the coast of Newfoundland in August, 1941 that produced the Atlantic Charter. I am aware that Newfoundland was still eight years away from joining the Canadian Confederation, but King would still have had a right to feel slighted, though if he did he left scant record of it. Nor did King play a significant role in either of the two summits held in Quebec City, which surely *was* a part of Canada. In H. V. Nelles's pithy phrase, King was more "hotelier than host" at Quebec despite his efforts to be photographed as often as possible with Churchill and Roosevelt.²

Roberts presents an argument that should be familiar to all students of Canadian military history. That vision is of a Canadian military that has made critical contributions at the tactical and operational levels of warfare, while remaining more or less content to leave the strategic decision making to its alliance partners. Such a picture of Canada helps to explain Canadian success within the British system at Vimy Ridge; Canadian failure, also within the British system, at Dieppe; and Canada's role in the American-dominated NATO alliance. To cite just one example of how junior a role Canada has sometimes played in the strategic thinking of its partners, in 1914 Prime Minister Robert Borden learned that Canada was at war the same way millions of his countrymen did: he read about it in his morning newspaper. Three years later, the British government did not inform Borden or Canadian Corps commander Arthur Currie about the Passchendaele offensive until it was underway.

Given the relatively small size of the Canadian armed forces, this subordinate role may seem natural and Canada's voluntary withdrawal from strategic decision making not terribly surprising. Canada's role as a junior but somewhat sovereign partner, of course, is quite similar to the roles played by the Australian, New Zealand, and South African forces in the 20th century as well. So why was Roberts surprised at the lack of a Canadian strategic voice? Have Canadian politicians simply been too shy about playing the cards they have had in their hand? Has Canada, despite its resources and contributions, been blotted out by the giants alongside whom they fight? Or have

² H. V. Nelles, *A Little History of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 201. The very poor personal relations between King and Churchill may have played a role as well. King called Churchill "The most dangerous man I have ever known" and Churchill called King "that little son of a bitch." The two men grew to respect one another in the course of the war, but never liked one another.

Canadians been content first with their imperial identity and later with their role as junior partners to the Americans?

It should be noted that not everyone agrees with the image of Canada as a little brother willingly following in the steps of a big brother. Henry Kissinger, for one, argued that while Canada has had relatively little freedom of strategic maneuver in the 20th century, it has used the freedom it has had “with skill and determination.”³ In Kissinger’s eyes, Canada has been able to carve out its own strategic sphere despite having fewer resources than its partners. Michael Carroll has made a similar argument in his recent book on Canadian peacekeeping operations in Egypt, and Tim Cook has suggested ways that Canadian leaders in the First World War used informal means to push a distinctly Canadian strategic vision.⁴ Such arguments would suggest that Canada has hewed to the British and American strategic visions not because it enjoys the role of the junior partner but because its strategic interests have generally – although not always – overlapped with those of their allies. It would also highlight the critical role that all partners in an alliance play in shaping grand strategy.

If you will allow me a slight tangent here, I’d like to point out, as I have to remind my Army War College students quite frequently, that the United States has also historically played the role of junior partner. Although my American friends do not like to be reminded of the fact, the United States was very much the strategic junior partner in World War I to the French. Thus did the American Expeditionary Forces fight the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, a campaign destined to be the largest ever fought up to that point by an American Army and one that killed 26,000 Americans and wounded 95,000 more. The AEF commander, General John Pershing, would have much preferred to have taken the easier route of attacking northeast toward Metz and Thionville, severing rail lines and engaging far less formidable German positions. The senior Allied strategist, the French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, overruled him and ordered

³ J. L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *For Better or Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman, 1991), p. viii.

⁴ Michael K. Carroll, *Pearson’s Peacekeepers: Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-1967* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009) and Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher: the Sensational Wars of Sam Hughes and General Arthur Currie* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2010). My thanks to Matt Symes for referring me to the Carroll book.

the Americans to attack northwest in the interests of keeping the Allied armies moving concentrically.

Nor did the Americans fare any better in the early years of World War II when much of the strategic decision making was British. In retrospect, virtually all scholars agree that the Americans were wrong to have insisted on an invasion of France in 1942; most also argue today that American desires for a 1943 invasion of France were equally unwise. Still, at the time, American senior leaders were furious at, in their eyes, having been outfoxed by their slicker and more experienced British counterparts. Only in 1943-1944, as American power became overwhelming and American strategists became more experienced, did the United States emerge as the dominant strategic voice of the Atlantic Alliance.

As with Americans, the role of junior strategic partner has not always sat well with Canadians. To some extent, national pride is involved, but I sense that the discomfort goes far deeper. There is something troubling, and rightfully so, about sending one's sons and daughters off to war with little say about when, how or where some other nation's generals will use them. It is particularly galling to watch those same sons and daughters die in operations with which you disagree. Such, of course, is the nature of alliance warfare, but it is far from easy to accept. Thus do Canadians continue to rankle, and justifiably so, at misguided British strategic choices like Passchendaele and Dieppe much as your Australian cousins remain angry about Gallipoli and Fromelles.

For Canadians, the relative lack of power vis-à-vis the United States has riled. But, if Kissinger and others are right, Canada has been able to play its cards well and avoid strategic dependence on its more powerful neighbor. Indeed, a focus on Canada's strategic dependence may be more cultural than strategic. To quote Robert Cuff, "a preoccupation with the unequal relationship of the Dominion and the Republic [meaning the United States] is, like saying "eh," one of the litmus tests of the true Canadian."⁵ I do not mean to underplay the differences between the United States and Canada, but I do think it is worth noting how unusual such a level of strategic harmony

⁵ Robert D. Cuff, *Canadian-American Relations in Wartime From the Great War to the Cold War* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1975), p. ix.

between large neighbors is in historical terms. As W. R. Riddell noted in a different context, US and Canadian strategic differences are mostly “skin deep, as compared with our essential and fundamental identity and unity.”⁶

The central aim of my talk today is to explore the role of Canadian strategic thinking in the 20th century. By strategy, I mean the ways that states use their national resources to address critical problems, in this case problems specifically related to national defense and war fighting. To put it perhaps a bit too simply, military strategy is the art of balancing ends, ways, and means. The ends are the aims of the state, as defined by politicians, ideally – although not always – closely advised by their senior military officials; the means are the resources (industrial, human, and natural) that the state creates or dedicates to national defense; and the ways are the methods used to employ those resources for, hopefully, the maximum gain.

Some scholars argue that strategy is essentially a function of material factors like demography and geography, while others argue that it derives from a combination of a state’s values and interests. In the Canadian case the most important material factors are its favorable geopolitical position, protected as it is on all four sides, and its relatively small population. Divining a state’s values and interests is a far more difficult intellectual exercise, especially in a diverse and pluralistic state like Canada. Both values and interests, of course, change over time, further complicating the process of trying to identify them over broad spans of history.

I will divide my talk today into three parts. First, I want to review some models that scholars have used to explain the strategic behavior of Canada. These models are designed to place Canada into a wider comparative context and give us some terms of reference. Second, I will look at the ways that Canada’s history has shaped the developments the models suggest and use some historical data to test the validity of those models. Finally, I will end by speculating a bit on what Canada’s strategic past might mean for its present and its future.

Scholars have posited three main models to explain Canada’s strategic behavior. The first, what we might call the Imperial model, is perhaps the most obvious. It suggests, as Roberts does, that Canada’s time as part of the British Empire inclined it to

⁶ Riddell quoted in Granatstein and Hillmer, *For Better or Worse*, p. x.

see strategic problems not in Canadian terms, but imperial and global terms. Thus could Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier say with little controversy in 1910 that “When Britain is at war, Canada is at war. There is no distinction.”⁷ Laurier was also the man who made famous the phrase “Ready, Aye, Ready” to show Canada’s determination to support Britain and the empire. Laurier’s successor and political rival Robert Borden similarly argued at the outbreak of World War I that Canadian and British interests were “demonstrably the same.” Thus, too, could some Canadians see in the South African War a “national” crisis. As late as 1939, the English-born Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock could joke that:

If you were to ask any Canadian, “Do you have to go to war if England does?” he’d answer at once, “Oh, no.” If you then asked, “Would you go to war if England does?” he’d answer “Oh, yes.” And if you asked “Why?” he would say, reflectively, “Well, you see, we’d have to.”⁸

In another of his great lines, Leacock quipped that Canadians became imperialists in order not to become colonials.⁹ In other words, by identifying closely with the empire Canadians hoped to derive benefits from it as rough equals rather than as subject peoples like the Irish or the Afrikaners. This instinctive link to England and the British Empire did not fit for all Canadians, a subject to which I shall return later, and it surely waned over time, but it was powerful enough to lead Canada into war with almost no debate in 1914 and again in 1939.

This imperial model suggests that as Great Britain began to fade as a great power, somewhere around 1942-1943, Canadians increasingly looked to their southern neighbor for protection and strategic guidance. The groundwork was being laid for such a relationship even before the war. In 1938, President Roosevelt committed the United States to the defense of Canadian sovereignty against any external threat in exchange for a promise from Mackenzie King that Canada would never allow its territory to be used as the base for an attack on the United States. The agreement merely stated formally what had become obvious to Americans and Canadians for at

⁷ Marc Milner, *Canada’s Navy: The First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 38.

⁸ Alan Bloomfield and Kim Richard Nossal, “Toward an Explicative Understanding of Strategic Culture: The Cases of Australia and Canada” *Contemporary Security Policy* 28, 2 (2007), p. 298.

⁹ Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*, p. 18.

least three decades, namely that their strategic interests overlapped almost perfectly. In August 1940 the two neighbors went a step further by agreeing to the Ogdensburg Pact which created a Permanent Joint Board on Defense. The agreement came after tellingly brief and informal talks aboard President Roosevelt's railway car and contained language clearly designed to demonstrate that it was more than just a wartime exigency. Rather, Ogdensburg was to form the basis of a permanent method for sharing in the joint defense of at least the northern half of the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰ The April, 1941 Hyde Park agreement, a mere six paragraphs long, forged closer economic links between the two allies to match the strategic ones laid out at Ogdensburg.

According to this imperial model, the strategic reliance of Canada on Britain and the United States continued to form the framework for Canada's strategy even after Canadians had become more nationalist in their thinking. The lack of a strategic voice in World II that Andrew Roberts noted, Canadian participation in NATO, the formation of the joint US/Canadian NORAD command, and Canadian participation in the Korean War all suggest a continuation of the basic pattern of Canadian involvement in alliances and systems dominated by larger powers. Indeed, if Terry Copp is right, Canadians have been willing to sacrifice for their place in this system in far greater numbers than necessary. Professor Copp argued that in Normandy, the high level of Canadian casualties reflected not their tactical or operational inferiority relative to their German enemies, but a willingness on the part of the Canadian Corps to remain in contact with the enemy "all out of proportion to its relative strength among the Allied armies."¹¹ But this willingness had its limits. In the era of the two world wars Canada, unlike Australia, never sought to fight in the Middle East or anywhere else their troops might be used to extend the reach of the British Empire. The loss of 2,000 untrained and unprepared Canadians at Hong Kong for no greater strategic purpose on Christmas

¹⁰ J. L. Granatstein, "Mackenzie King and Canada at Ogdensburg, August, 1940" in Joel Sokolsky and Joseph Jockel, eds. *Fifty Years of Canada-United States Defense Cooperation: The Road from Ogdensburg* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press), p. 9.

¹¹ Terry Copp, "To the Last Canadian? Casualties in 21st Army Group," in *Canadian Military History* 18,1 (Winter, 2009): pp. 3-6 and the presentation Prof. Copp gave to the 19th Military History Colloquium at the University of Waterloo in May, 2008. See also his *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Day, 1941 could not have encouraged Canadians to seek a wider role in Asia.¹² Canadians, it would seem, were still trying to be imperial without being colonial.

A second model, more along the lines of Kissinger's observation, looks at Canada as a "middle power," able to punch above its weight in military and international affairs. Some middle powers are able to fulfill this role through abnormally high military spending, like Israel, or through some special provision like France's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Canada's ability to have a voice disproportionate to its size came, in the era of the world wars, from the tremendous accomplishments of its conventional armed forces. At places like Vimy Ridge, Juno Beach, and the Scheldt Estuary, Canadian units displayed a prowess that made them one of the most formidable elements of the British Army. It is Canada's supposed failure to convert that military prowess into a strategic voice that Roberts criticized.

Since the end of the Second World War, however, Canada's ticket to middle power status has come in large part via a different route, that of peacekeeping. Although peacekeeping normally has occupied only a minority of Canadian defense budgeting, it has come to play a disproportionate role in the Canadian political and cultural spheres. I am sure that most of you recall, as I certainly do, the Molson "I am Canadian" ad from 2000 in which Joe, the proud Canadian, shouts "I believe in peacekeeping not policing." As he says the word "peacekeeping" a hand behind him makes the peace sign. Then as he says "policing" it becomes a gun. In the background, the crowd roars its approval.¹³ The none too subtle message, of course, is that Canada sees its strategic role in terms quite different from that of the United States, a theme to which I will also return. What is important here is the extent to which Canada has used its role as peacekeepers to develop for itself a voice that is both greater than its resources might suggest and, perhaps more importantly, a self-image that allows Canadians to think about themselves in contradistinction to their southern neighbors. Contributing to peacekeeping operations also gives Canada a roughly equal voice on the international bodies that provide their legal frameworks.

¹² See David Bercuson, *Maple Leaf Against the Axis: Canada's Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995), pp. 45-55. Canadians did contribute to air and naval operations in the Pacific theater after Hong Kong.

¹³ The ad is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXtVrDPhHBg>. While written by Canadians, it was directed by an American.

The careful ways that Canadian politicians have tried to avoid parsing peacekeeping and war fighting in Afghanistan show an interesting unintended consequence of this development. Peacekeeping has become so deeply woven into the Canadian psyche that for many Canadians no other strategic mission is legitimate, however difficult the distinction between peacekeeping and war fighting is to maintain in practice. The Canadian Forces' continued commitment to hard power thus sometimes sits uncomfortably alongside its public face as peacekeepers.

A third model derives mostly from material factors. Given that Canada has enjoyed a physical security envied by most other states, and given its lack of existential security interests, we might posit that Canada is a status quo power. Certainly, Canada benefits more from global stability than it does from disruption just as it benefited tremendously from the era of the *Pax Britannica*. Seen in this light Canada's role in peacekeeping, in NATO, and in sending soldiers to Russia in 1919 to try to destroy Bolshevism all suggest that Canada's strategic interests overlap with those of Britain and the United States most closely when stabilizing the global system is the goal.

Since the end of the Second World War, Canada's forward security strategy has focused on the stability of global trade and the prevention of potentially destabilizing wars through peacekeeping. More modern concepts like the Responsibility to Protect, humanitarian intervention, and human security offer an ounce of prevention over a pound of cure approach to strategy and fit within the clearly articulated values of the Canadian people. These areas might also be the only places where Canada has the power, albeit mostly moral, to convince the United States to do something it might prefer not to do.

Peacekeeping operations, although they certainly come with their own tensions, have the distinct advantage of not requiring Canada to choose sides. Working through multilateral organizations and institutionalist principles further enhances these strategic preferences. Canada's commitment to internationalism, in which Canada works within a global and legalized system of agreements even when it cannot control that system, is perhaps its most important distinction from the United States. While Americans have never liked the idea of submitting its strategic and military decisions to international groups unless it was clearly calling the shots, Canada has been willing to abide by the

will of the international community as expressed by the United Nations and other organizations. Peacekeeping fits in nicely with this internationalist perspective.

Canada not only accepted but welcomed (and indeed helped to define) the role of peacekeepers after the Second World War, starting in 1948 with a Canadian deployment to Kashmir and enhanced by Canada's critical role in Egypt during the 1956 Suez crisis. Lester Pearson's 1957 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of those efforts helped to solidify Canada's standing as a world leader in peacekeeping missions. It also helped to demonstrate Canada's strategic independence from the United Kingdom, the traditional global power, and the United States, the new super power. Seen in the light of preserving the status quo, however, Canada's turn to peacekeeping operations after World War II is less a revolution in Canadian strategic thinking than a natural outgrowth of it. Peacekeeping in Cyprus, for example, simultaneously enhanced the stability of the eastern Mediterranean and of the NATO alliance itself. Canada can thereby use both its conventional and peacekeeping military power to maintain the international system and can do so at relatively low cost because its own security is almost a given.

With this basic review of models having given us a basis from which to discuss strategy, I'd like to move on to the second part of my talk. To get closer to an answer to the question of what has driven Canadian strategic thinking we need to consider the historical factors relevant to Canada's strategic history. In other words, we need to match these models to historical evidence. Such an exercise could take up many dissertations, of course, and involve myriad events from Canadian history. Here I want to focus on just three: the historical consequences of the imperial legacy; the importance of the Canadian-American relationship; and the extremely tricky issue of ethnicity in Canadian history. In the latter especially, I am no expert, but the question is so central to the history of both French and English Canada that to avoid it seems to me irresponsible.

First, Canada's place in the British Empire bestowed upon its strategic culture an international outlook from the start. In sharp contrast to the United States, Canada has almost always worked within an international system governed and managed from afar. It has also had to shape and understand its strategic interests in relation to events

across a vast empire. Unlike the United States, which developed a notion of American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny that attempted to place the United States outside the rules of historical development, Canada evolved within clearly defined limits set by a global system that it did not and could not dominate.

Over time, of course, Canada began to separate itself from this system, a process far too complex to discuss here. Nevertheless, Canada never has cut those last cords that link it to the British and imperial system and heritage. I was in Canada during the visit of Prince William and Princess Kate and confess that, as an American Francophile, I was surprised by the enthusiasm with which Canadians received them, just as I was as a kid whenever I'd see that giant portrait of the Queen in the Winnipeg Arena during hockey broadcasts. The reintroduction of "Royal" into the Canadian armed forces nomenclature is another symbolic indication of these abiding links, although I am of course aware that for many Canadians the change in names has mostly to do with domestic politics and self-image. Still, Canada has had the historical experience of working within international norms as a less-than-equal power, and this experience may well have conditioned it to play the role of peacekeeper and middle power for which it is so well known and respected today.

This history might also explain what Justin Massie calls Canada's role as a "soft" (or friendly) balancer of the United States. In this role, Canada seeks to have just enough military power to give it a voice at the table during strategic discussions in Washington, as well as in London, the UN, and NATO. Canada is not, of course, seeking to play the role of a "hard" balancer in a classic balance of power setting, but instead tries to use the power it has to influence decision making and even play the role of mediator when American, British, and French strategic interests are in opposition to one another, as they were over Iraq in 2003.¹⁴ Being an Atlantic power with historical and strategic roots to the United States, Great Britain, and France, Canada is in a favorable position to talk to and influence all three, but only if it can earn that seat at the high-stakes table. The ante has been a willingness to contribute on the western front, Italy, Normandy, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in numbers far in excess of the minimal contribution necessary to save diplomatic face.

¹⁴ Justin Massie, "Making Sense of Canada's 'Irrational' International Security Policy," *International Journal* (Summer 2009): pp. 625-645.

The second historical phenomenon has caused me no small amount of grief in my visits to Canada: the incredible, nearly unprecedented, security of Canadian borders, effectively since the War of 1812 resulted in the demilitarization of the Great Lakes. I made this point once over drinks at a reception at the Royal Military College in Kingston only to have a Canadian Forces major jab two fingers in my chest and berate me – personally, I might add – for the Fenian raids. At first I tried to assuage him by joking that at the time of the raids my own ancestors were more obsessed with dodging Cossacks than liberating Ireland, but to no avail. I then tried, also to no avail, to explain how much of an historical footnote the raids really were, only to be quite surprised the next day in Ottawa to see how prominently they figured in a display at the Canadian War Museum on wars against terrorism.

With all due respect to my friend in Kingston, the implicit comparison to 9/11 is overblown. However important the Fenians were to uniting Canada and awakening Canadians to the need to take defense more seriously, Desmond Morton has it right when he calls the Fenian raid on New Brunswick “comic opera.”¹⁵ Even the largest of the Fenian raids, in the Niagara region in 1866, failed to stop the Gladstone government from announcing the withdrawal of British troops from Canada in 1869. Despite the continued attempts by the Fenians to cause trouble in Canada, the last redcoats did indeed leave in 1871. The Fenian raid on Manitoba in that same year, which my RMC friend insisted amounted to an American attempt to annex Canada, was repelled by 200 poorly-trained militiamen.¹⁶ (Parenthetically, I might add that, in another parallel with American history, the Fenian raids, as well as the issue of frontier security, reinforced a faith in militia that was to have serious consequences in the twentieth century for both nations.)

Especially in the era between the turn of the twentieth century and the development of Soviet ballistic missiles in the 1950s, Canada enjoyed virtually perfect security of its borders when most of the rest of the world felt under threat at one point or another. As Roger Sarty put it, “Our ability to remain virtually disarmed through much of our history has been the happy result of geography and the strength of friendly

¹⁵ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), p. 88.

¹⁶ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 25-26.

powers.”¹⁷ Thus, protecting Canada’s borders came at almost no price. As much as Canadians might still gain some political traction by calling the United States “the historic enemy” it is closer to the truth to say that American power, while perhaps a threat to Canadian cultural or economic independence, has since 1900 (if not much earlier) reinforced Canadian political sovereignty much, much more than it has threatened it.

That statement is as fundamental as it is obvious. It also provides an important contrast to the United States, where the southern border with Mexico was a source of constant tension and violence from 1911 to 1917. Indeed, the differing situations on the two southern borders explain some of the differing reactions of the Canadian and American governments to the early years of the First World War. Canada, with its border secured, was in a position to devote as many military resources as it could generate to the defense of western Europe. The United States, on the other hand, had its hands full trying to, in Woodrow Wilson’s revealing words, teach Mexicans “to elect good men.”¹⁸ The failure of an expedition led by Gen. John Pershing to find and bring justice to Pancho Villa further drove home to Americans the risks of engaging in Europe while borders much closer to home remained so dangerously unstable.

The contrast in physical security and international outlook frustrated Canadian strategists. While Canada was pouring its blood and treasure into the fields of Flanders and France, the Americans were declaring themselves too proud to fight in Europe while simultaneously intervening in Mexico. As J. L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer note with some irony, for Canadian leaders “it was almost as if the American people were unwilling to believe that anything could be accomplished through fighting.”¹⁹ Contrary to the high ideals Wilson espoused, it was only when the Zimmermann Telegram showed a direct German threat to America’s southern border that he and his cabinet finally decided that the United States had no choice but to join the war.

¹⁷ Roger Sarty, “The Nationalization of Military History: Scholarship, Politics, and the Canadian War Museum,” in *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century* by Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick, p. 112 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ John Milton Cooper, *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, and War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), p. 281.

¹⁹ Granatstein and Hillmer, *For Better or Worse*, p. 60.

Security of borders provided Canada with the same ability to focus overseas in the Second World War. Canada, its senator and diplomat Raoul Dandurand boasted, lived in a fireproof house far from the conflagrations of Europe and Asia.²⁰ As demonstrated by the Ogdensburg and Hyde Park agreements, America proved more than willing to play the role of volunteer firefighter, assuming for itself an active role in guaranteeing Canadian security. In large part, this American willingness represented a self-interested forward strategy of its own, of course, but it also reflected a common understanding of the symbiotic and synergistic links between American strategy and Canadian strategy.

Canada's physical security first really came under threat in the heyday of the Cold War. That threat came not from the United States, but the Soviet Union, and the threat involved not Fenians but intercontinental ballistic missiles. Canada's frozen and once impenetrable north thus became a threatened border and potential battleground. The strategic consequence of this problem was an agreement with the supposed historic enemy to take joint responsibility for hemispheric defense through NORAD. The ease with which American and Canadian military forces were able to conceive of North America as one security zone reveals how close the strategic and historical identifications between the two nations really were. It could only have surprised people not paying close attention to the strategic situation since at least the 1930s.

While, in the words of George Ignatieff, Canada had sought to live "distinct from but in harmony with the world's most powerful and dynamic nation," the American connection has been fundamental for ensuring Canada's sovereignty and power. Thus do Ignatieff and Massie argue that when making peacekeeping choices in the 1990s, Canada has leaned toward those operations that are most likely to make the Americans happy. Massie, a Canadian, is mildly critical of what he calls Canada's "continental soft-bandwaggoning" strategy and its reliance on peacekeeping as its strategic identity, both of which have allowed Canada to reap the benefits of alliance with the United States while avoiding both commitment and dependence.²¹

²⁰ Karsten Jung, *Of Peace and Power: Promoting Canadian Interests Through Peacekeeping* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 31.

²¹ Massie, "Making Sense," p. 627.

The third historical factor, the strategic impact of the tensions between English and French Canada, is undoubtedly the most difficult to discuss and analyze. A few points seem clear. First, that French Canadians have never identified with either the imperial world view of their English Canadian countrymen or their emotional links to the Old World. As a result, French Canadians have not felt the emotional attachments to Europe that have bound English Canadians; nor have they felt any mythic attachment to France, either. It is worth noting that the ecstatic reaction to Charles de Gaulle in Montreal in 1967 came not as a result of his shouting "Vive la France," but "Vive le Québec Libre." It is unlikely that most Quebecois would have reacted nearly as positively to a call of "Vive la France." They were certainly less motivated to volunteer for war in 1914 and 1939 than their English countrymen.

One important strategic consequence of the French/English divide has been Canada's inability to make maximum use of its human resources. It has made conscription, always a difficult option in the Anglo-Saxon military tradition, an even more controversial subject. The intense anti-French and anti-Catholic opinions of key military leaders like Sam Hughes have, of course, not helped matters. Desmond Morton blames Hughes personally for the low level of French Canadian participation in World War I, although he also cites the strong economy of Quebec for drawing men into factories instead of into uniform.²²

French Canadian nationalists like Henri Bourassa were opposed to Canada pouring its blood and treasure into what they saw as a European war, but it was never their intention to use the war as an excuse to undermine Canada when it was at war. Neither Bourassa nor anyone else planned, led, or contemplated anything like a Quebecois version of the Easter Rising that broke out in Dublin in 1916; the Quebec riots two years later pale in historical comparison. In the Second World War, French Canadians volunteered in larger numbers than they had in the First, and they supported the Mackenzie King government's war policies more enthusiastically than they had Robert Borden's. Still, the comparatively low numbers of French Canadian volunteers from 1939 to 1945 meant that the Canadian Navy and Air Force could function under an English-only system and when a vote came in 1942 to release the government from an earlier no conscription pledge, English Canadians voted four to

²² Morton, *Military History of Canada*, pp. 152-153.

one in favor while French Canadians voted nearly four to one against.²³ Nevertheless, even if there had been a direct Japanese or German threat to Canada itself, it is impossible to imagine that French Canada would ever have produced a pro-Nazi or pro-collaborationist regime akin to those found in Europe in Asia.

There is, of course, a link between the French/English divide and the Canadian embrace of peacekeeping, as that mission is popular on both sides of the linguistic and cultural divide. Especially as the Canadian Forces have become better integrated and more bilingual, French and English Canadians have come to general agreement on the basic strategic vision of their country, surviving even the Somalia scandal of the mid-1990s. At the same time that those investigations were producing a report tellingly titled *Dishonoured Legacy*, Canadians could visit a new statue to UN peacekeepers unveiled in Ottawa. On its base is etched an excerpt, in English and in French, from Pearson's foundational 1956 offer of Canadian forces to the UN peacekeeping mission in Egypt. It reads, in part, "We need action not only to end the fighting but to make the peace."

If Joe from the Molson ad had it right, then the Canadian embrace of the peacekeeping role is not only about global strategy. Conveniently ignoring Canada's traditional role as a conventional fighting force, the ad is also about making a clear demonstration of the differences in the Canadian and American strategic visions. Not for nothing did the ad's bit on peacekeeping follow the line "I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack." And, also not for nothing, did the ad include near its end the line "Canada is the best part of North America." Embracing peacekeeping is thus represented as a way of distinguishing Canada from its powerful and occasionally domineering friend to the south.

But, easy as it may be to do, we should be careful not to take this image of American domineering too far. Our two histories have more in common than almost any other two nations on earth, a point eloquently made by President Kennedy in his May, 1961 address to the Canadian parliament wherein he said:

²³ Morton, *Military History of Canada*, p. 190.

We share more than a common border. We share a common heritage, traced back to those early settlers who traveled from the beachheads of the Maritime Provinces and New England to the far reaches of the Pacific Coast. . . . We share common values from the past, a common defense line at present, and common aspirations for the future-our future, and indeed the future of all mankind.

He also, notably, said “je me sens vraiment entre des amis.”²⁴

Similarities exist at the strategic level, of course, but they also exist in numerous parallels across time from the mythic reliance on militia to the isolationism of the interwar years to the internment of ethnic Japanese during World War II to the popular protests of the 1960s to name just a few. In discussions with both my Canadian and American colleagues I am continually amazed at the historical episodes that one side claims to be unique to their country only to find that an almost perfect parallel exists in the other. I was interested to note recently while rereading the twentieth century parts of Desmond Morton’s *Military History of Canada* that the phrase “unlike the United States” appears just once. By contrast, parallels to the United States are everywhere.

That said, I am not arguing that our two histories are identical or that Canada has meekly followed in America’s strategic footsteps. Canada has, in fact, done a better job of developing an independent strategic profile from the Americans than it did from the British in the heyday of empire. Just as some of the most important trades in hockey are the ones you don’t make, so, too, has Canada been shaped by the military operations it has avoided. Three of them are well-known to most Canadians: the war in Vietnam, the Pierre Trudeau government’s refusal to cooperate with Ronald Reagan’s “Star Wars” ballistic missile defense scheme in the 1980s, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.²⁵

Perhaps less well-known is Canada’s refusal to take part in two Cold War operations, the postwar occupation of Germany and the Berlin Airlift. In the first case, Canada withdrew its forces from Germany in spring, 1946 despite vigorous efforts by both Britain and the United States to keep Canadian troops on the continent. In the

²⁴ <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8136#axzz1nsT7vdi0>

²⁵ Unlike Canada, Australia participated in both Vietnam and Iraq, indicating that there is nothing inconsistent with former Dominion or Commonwealth nations taking part in such wars.

second case, Canada was certainly awake to the dangers of the brewing Cold War and was in fact in the process of dramatically increasing defense spending, but its leaders drew a line at taking an active role in the airlift into Berlin. Defense Minister Brooke Clayton defended the decision by arguing that Canadian participation could lead to war with Russia, although it is hard to see how Canada could have avoided the (forgive the pun) fallout of a war between the US and Russia over Berlin. Tellingly, Clayton defended the decision to refuse the RCAF's participation in the airlift because Canada would have "no say whatever in determining the policy. . . . [the RCAF would] in fact have no status in the matter except as the subsidiary or paid help of the United Kingdom or the United States."²⁶

These revealing statements must not be read as an unwillingness on Canada's part to play any role in the Cold War whatsoever. Canada did, of course, send troops to Korea under a UN mandate and remained a steadfast member of NATO. Mackenzie King, moreover, wrote in his diary during the Berlin Airlift crisis that in any "real fight against Communism. . . it was quite certain that . . . Canada would wish to come in instantly." There could, he noted, "be no two views on that score."²⁷ Canadian reluctance to become involved in the Berlin Airlift, then, seems to have been less about strategic disagreements with the United States than about protecting a distinct Canadian voice in the debates over Cold War strategy. Having been denied that voice in two world wars, Canada was not about to sacrifice it again.

In the final part of my talk, let me suggest that this history may help to illuminate discussions of Canada's strategic options as it gets ready to face what might well be its most pressing threat to sovereignty since the War of 1812: the opening of the Arctic waterways. The Arctic problem is a fascinating way to watch strategy formulation happen almost from a vacuum. Just a few years ago, Arctic strategy was the preserve of a small number of specialists. Today it involves the core strategic interests of not just Canada and the United States but Russia, Norway, Denmark, even China.

²⁶ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (Athens: university of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 174.

²⁷ Thompson and Randall, *Canada and the United States*, p. 177.

I am just speculating here, but Canada has several options available as it thinks through this new problem. They include working through and with alliance partners, most obviously the United States; developing an independent strategic voice at the risk of tensions with the United States; and an international institutionalist approach whereby Canada would seek global agreements in which all states would act as more or less equal partners. If anything I have said here today is even close to right, then each of these approaches has a precedent in Canadian history. The first option, working carefully with the United States, has its antecedents in the imperial model and may be Canada's best option if its leaders fear China and Russia more than they fear the United States. It might well be a case of Canada dancing with the generally friendly devil it knows, even if this means yielding some of its strategic voice to the Americans.

The second approach, trying to work independently, has its precedents in the Canadian refusal to participate in the grand designs of its partners, most notably in Berlin, Vietnam, and Iraq. This option best protects Canadian sovereignty and freedom of maneuver, but it places the entire burden for defending Canada's interests squarely on Canadian shoulders. This approach may not only be beyond Canada's defense resources, it might also put Canada on a collision course with the other players in the Arctic.

The third option, the international institutional one, would place Canada on familiar ground as a legacy from its peacekeeping traditions. Building international agreements and looking for consensus through legal and diplomatic means is far less costly and far less confrontational – if it works. Like all such agreements, however, it means that the signatory powers to any Arctic treaty are unlikely to get everything that they want.

As Canada's leaders think about their strategic future, they would be well advised to remember their history as it was, not as the myths of Canadian dependence might suggest. If Andrew Roberts had it right that Canada had been more than willing to sacrifice its strategic voice in the era of the two world wars, it did not leave an immutable legacy of strategic dependency. Canadians like Joe, moreover, will do well to remember that their nation's military history involves more than just peacekeeping.

It is not my place, of course, to recommend a strategic course for Canada. It is, however, my job as an historian to suggest that the experiences of the past condition the choices of the present and of the future. If I am right, it suggests that Canada is unlikely to face the challenges of Arctic security alone. It also suggests that despite Canada's cultural preference for what Nils Ørvik called "defence against help," or a desire to ensure full national sovereignty without the assistance of the Americans, it will need the United States as the United States will need Canada.²⁸ Nothing in this symbiosis is unhistorical, unnatural, or unusual as long as it protects the strategic interests of both nations. And if those interests draw Canada and the United States closer together I, for one, will be the happier for it. Thank you.

²⁸ Nils Ørvik, "Canadian Security and Defence Against Help," *Survival* 26 (January-February 1984): pp. 26-31.