

Foreign Policy or Emotional Impulse?

The 2003 US/UK-led coalition of the willing on Iraq has often been held as a contemporary example of failed foreign policy analysis that resulted in the call for military action. While Canada did not join that coalition, it did voluntarily decide to participate in the Afghanistan war. Was that decision based on the perceived threat, balanced with a measured understanding of foreign policy implications, in terms of the history, cultures and traditions of Afghanistan? Or was it an emotional impulse to “help” a society living in violence and fear? Or was it a political desire to be seen as a military player on the world stage?

Defining a national threat from rogue states, or stateless groups, located far beyond Canada’s borders, adds to the complexity of deciding on the deployment of military resources, and assessing what needs to be held in reserve. From the perspective of rapidly emerging and evolving global threats, it is clear that the deployment of Canada’s military resources must be based on sound foreign policy formulation.

To gain some insight on these issues, I attended a May 2015 conference on Traditions and Transitions in Foreign Affairs at the University of Toronto. Sponsored by the *Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History* and the *Canadian International Council*, the conference faculty was a gathering of Canadian Foreign Affairs luminaries, and the name of the game was “spontaneity in discussing the issues”

which was accompanied by a lot of partisan banter. Canadian Foreign Affairs professionals and elected politicians of all political leanings ensured that “tradition” was respected and that the “transitions” sustaining Canada’s place in world affairs were acknowledged.

Traditions and Transitions

The conference began with a lively panel discussion among some former members of parliament. **Hon. Barbara McDougall**, former Progressive Conservative (PC) MP and Secretary of State for External Affairs; **Rt. Hon. Paul Martin**, former Liberal leader and Prime Minister of Canada (2003-2006); and **Hon. David MacDonald**, former PC MP and Minister of Communications, discussed the traditions and that have defined Canada’s role in international relations.

Martin recounted his father’s experiences as a member of the Canadian delegation tasked with converting the League of Nations into the United Nations (UN). He stressed that the vision of countries coming together was in keeping with how Canada saw its role in the post-WWII world. While some established nations favoured controlling UN membership by denying states that were gaining their independence from their colonialist masters, the Canadian contingent promoted equal access to membership for all nations.

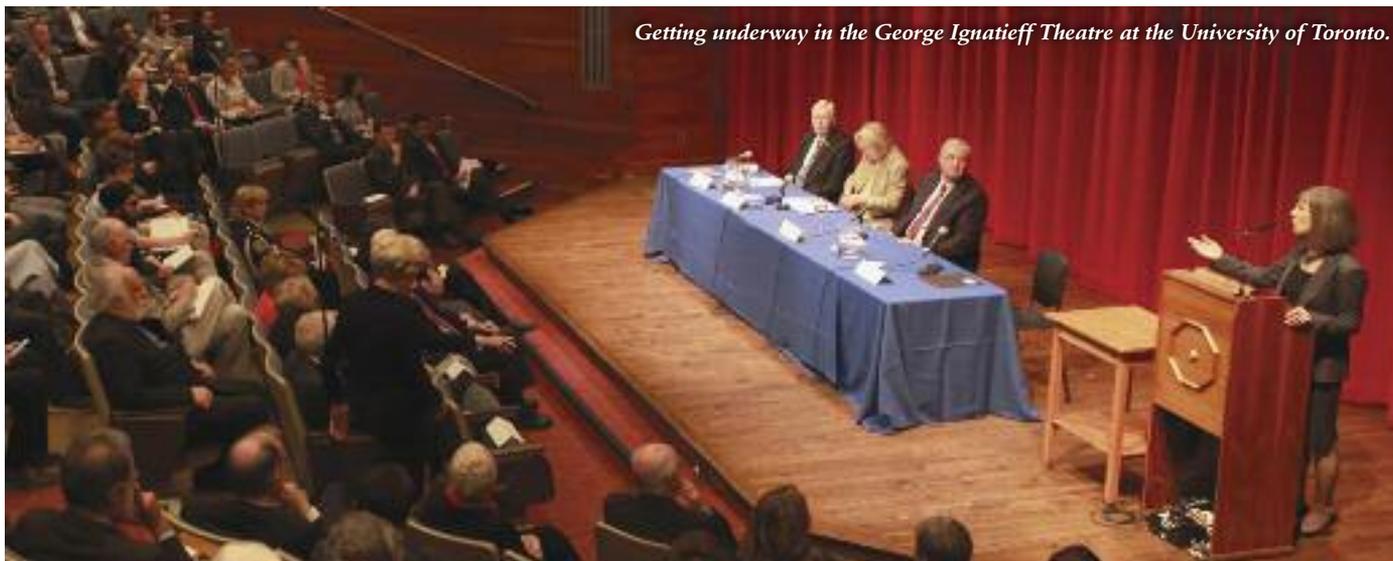
McDougall talked about transitions related to ending the Cold War plus the implosion of the USSR. She recalled pleasant encounters with Mikhail Gorbachev and his genuine desire for openness (glasnost) and restructuring (perestroika) of the USSR economy. She described how the emergence of Boris Yeltsin introduced USSR to the electoral process relative to the appointment of a leader. McDougall lamented the West’s (and particularly the U.S.) behaviour of “triumphentalism” over the fall of the USSR, and the lack of a more conciliatory realization, noting that the West is now paying for such errors of judgment in foreign affairs.



Paul Martin



Barbara McDougall



Getting underway in the George Ignatieff Theatre at the University of Toronto.

Throughout the conference, Canada's relationship with its "elephant" sized neighbour to the south was a persistent issue. This began with MacDonald reminding delegates that the Americans will not be there to cover our backs in the future as they have so often in the past. He stressed that Canada's relationship with the U.S. is undergoing a transition and that this change was being caused in part by a polarized, dysfunctional Congress; claiming that the American political process is having a "nervous breakdown."

Other seismic shifts influencing Canadian Foreign Policy – such as the Korean War, Vietnam War, South African apartheid, Vietnamese refugees (Boat people), and others were discussed. The challenge was said to be the redefining of new institutions that provide oversight and guidance to a new world order, in which all nations need to feel confident that they have some sense of equity around decisions being made. Entities like G8, WTO, IMF, and UN were questioned as being suitable for managing the new order. China's new infrastructure bank was highlighted as the trend of things to come when old establishments fail to adjust. This panel was in general agreement that the UN provides an indispensable platform for international dialogue.

All three panelists agreed that the present government was not following Canada's traditional balanced approach towards global concerns, preferring instead to choose sides on positions like the Middle East. It was acknowledged these trends are taking a toll on moral at Foreign Affairs and that it will take time for Canada to assume its traditional role in global councils.

New Challenges: Asia

David Mulroney, former Ambassador of Canada to the People's Republic of China (2009-2012), and **Rana Sarkar**, former President & CEO Canada-India Business Council, discussed Canada's role in Asia. Acknowledging Canada's comfort level with its Trans-Atlantic allies, the message was that to ignore events unfolding in Asia would place Canada on the fringe of world affairs going forward.

Emphasizing the influence of the Chinese middle class in world affairs, Mulroney noted that the Chinese no longer seeks to emulate the West. They are building on their own traditions and expect the world to adopt them. To illustrate

China's influence in international relations he told the story of a Fiji diplomat saying how great it was doing business with the Chinese and not having to endure "those human rights lectures" from the Australians and Americans. Mulroney argued that this is the same logic behind China's success in Africa and South America, and that we lose business and principles on other states. As an example of the increasing political maturity of the Chinese, Mulroney has noticed that when a Chinese-Canadian MP visits China, that person's heritage is clearly of less importance than their role as a Member of Parliament.

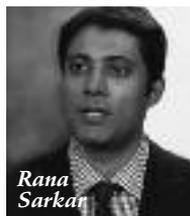
However, despite acknowledging conflict between principles and practices, Mulroney maintains that Western democracies cannot turn a blind eye to human rights violations, nor can they stand by and allow China to redefine its maritime domain in the South China Sea by building islands around rocks as a way of complying with the definition of sovereignty in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Asserting that Canada has a lot more in common with India than China, Sarkar stressed that Canadian businesses take far less risk in a familiar language and legal setting than doing business with a mysterious Chinese culture. Expectations under Prime Minister Narendra Modi are that India will be more favourable to expansion of business ventures and that corruption will become less problematic.

Both speakers expressed concern that foreign affairs is being used for image management by politicians with the objective to appeal to domestic Diaspora voting blocks, which Canada has lots of. They agreed that such practices are not uncommon among all parties, but suggested that the current government is using international relations as an election tool more than cementing Canada's place in the world. A photo of Mr. Harper in front of two F-18 jets with the Canadian flag behind them was held as an example of inappropriately allocated resources.



David Mulroney



Rana Sarkar

Visiting heads of state to Canada were also seen as being used by the government to capitalize on gaining favour with local Diasporas. Recent visits by Philippine's Benigno Aquino and India's Narendra Modi were said to facilitate photo ops that appeared in the Diaspora media. Mr. Modi's presence at Patrick Brown's campaign for Ontario PC leader was said to likely have had some influence on his May 2015 win. Mr. Harper was said to prefer relationships with world leaders who share his ideology, like the Prime Ministers of Australia and Israel, than he does with President Obama.

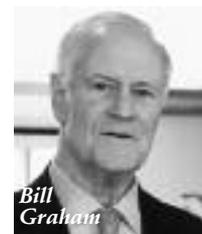
The Prime Minister's initiatives in foreign affairs were raised frequently during the conference. With respect to Canada/U.S. relations, concern was expressed over the irony that, when Americans chose a President who reflects traditional Canadian values, relations between the two leaders have been strained.

Reflections of a Defence and Foreign Minister

In his Keynote address, the Honourable Bill Graham, former Minister of both Foreign Affairs and National Defence, provided considerable insight on the nuances of Canadian diplomacy. His account of dealing with the Bush administration's post-9/11 "war on terror" when the Canadian Government had concluded that it would not go in that direction, epitomized Canada's relations with the U.S.

Graham's account of upgrading Canada's military after the fiscal constraint needed to "balance the books" was a multi-faceted portrayal of interfacing relations among politicians, military and the bureaucracy.

Acknowledging Louise Arbour's call to see "political empathy as a strategic advantage" Graham claims that Canada's "need to understand our fellow citizens in this bilingual, multicultural society, has found a natural home in the world of diplomacy."



Bill Graham

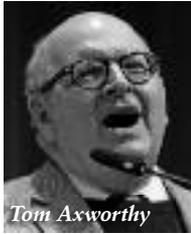


Louise Arbour

The New Challenges: The Arctic and Europe / Russia

The only part of the conference that addressed foreign affairs with a military emphasis was the session on the Arctic. This discussion was led by **Tom Axworthy**, CEO of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, and **Dr. Janice Stein**, founding Director of the Munk School of Global Affairs, at the University of Toronto.

Axworthy acknowledged that the Prime Minister put the Arctic on the map more than any other politician with his “use it or lose it” advocacy but, according to opinion polls sponsored by Gordon Foundation, that message has not reached the average Canadian.



Tom Axworthy

Axworthy stressed that the Arctic is the new Canadian Frontier and claims that while we can establish contractual agreements with all members of the Arctic Council, we should be on guard when dealing with Russia. He called for more investment in defence of this frontier, and offered two key examples: a Canadian Arctic port and an Arctic University.

In response to a member of the audience discussing a conspiracy involving the Russian takeover of the Arctic, Stein commented that when you have to choose between stupidity and conspiracy it is stupidity wins out 90 percent of the time.



Janice Stein

“Interventions”

Commenting on the way the world is changing, Stein suggested that “religion” has become a major construct that needs to be seriously considered when intervening in cultural wars in foreign lands. In an email to *FrontLine* she clarified her comments as follows: “Seventy years ago we made a deep mistake in thinking about the world; we didn’t foresee the importance of religion in politics. The post-war consensus was rather that secularization would continue to grow as societies developed and became more educated. As religious beliefs became a respected private matter, the

secular liberal order would deepen and strengthen around the world. We now need to understand the important role that religion plays in large parts of the world, and build that into our foreign policy.”

The session on “Intervention” added emphasis to the need to understand how different peoples regard their religion.

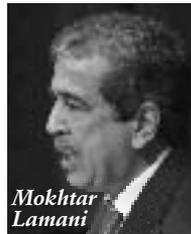
Panelists **Patrick Graham**, a journalist with frontline experience reporting from Iraq, and **Professor Jack Cunningham** of the Bill Graham Centre, spoke about Afghanistan in this context; and **Mokhtar Lamani**, former head of the Office of the UN-League of Arab States Joint Special Representative for Syria in Damascus, provided a firsthand account of religious and cultural tension among the different ethnic and religious clusters in the region. Echoing the advice of Dr. Stein, Mr. Lamani provided considerable insight on the need to appreciate how families and individuals relate to one another ethnically, religiously and nationally as an integral part of foreign affairs policy formulation.



Patrick Graham



Jack Cunningham



Mokhtar Lamani

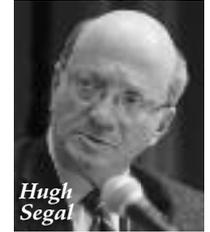
The urgency for a new realization around religion was further highlighted by Graham as he stressed the importance of understanding and appreciating the cultural differences between Sunni, Shia and Kurds, as well as the sub-categories of class and secular/humanist behaviour within each religious classification. He outlined how such categories relate to entities like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, complementing Stein’s comment on understanding religious diversity.

Recognizing the way the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US/UK-led coalition of the willing altered the status quo in the region and influenced geopolitical security globally, the panel did not hold any hope that a peaceful resolution would come out of the region anytime soon.

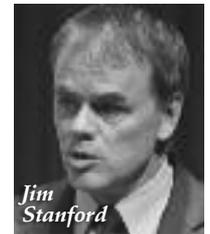
Canada/U.S. relationship

While it was repeatedly stated that the relationship between Canada and the US is changing, there was no denying that Canada’s most important foreign policy arrangement is its dealings with the United States. Presumably in recognition of this reality the last three sessions addressed Canada’s relations with the United States.

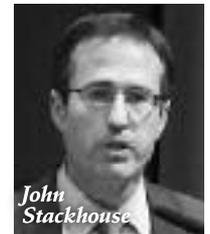
One session provided key empirical analyses of the 1988 Canada/U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA). **Hugh Segal**, Master of Massey College; **Jim Stanford**, an economist with Unifor, the new union formed in 2013 from the merger of the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communication Energy and Papers’ union; and **John Stackhouse**, Senior VP at RBC, gave an informative and very entertaining interpretation of their respective viewpoints on the “game changing” Canada/U.S. paradigm.



Hugh Segal



Jim Stanford



John Stackhouse

Also, at this session, **Michael Urban**, Visiting Fellow from Balliol College, Oxford, eloquently portrayed the need to understand “Trust” (or the lack of it) between nations, as a tactical construct. He based this analysis on his research of Canada’s non-acquisition of an independent nuclear arsenal, 1947-1957, which he incorporated with research in psychology, neurology and neuro-economics. Urban explained how trust between Americans and Canadians has traditionally been easy to establish since they exhibit very similar traits of interactivity, homogeneity, common interests and shared experiences. Given these norms, many believe Canada has felt more comfortable dealing directly



Michael Urban

with the U.S. than, say, Mexico under the North American FTA. It was acknowledged that, with the emergence of the Hispanic voting bloc in the United States, Canada can expect its relationship with the U.S. to alter somewhat in the future. There was some consensus among presenters that Canada is neither embracing NAFTA nor exploiting strong ties with Mexico.

The empirical analyses mentioned earlier served as a precursor to political debate on the 1988 FTA. The **Hon. Patrick Boyer**, former Member of Parliament (Conservative); **John Brewin**, former Member of Parliament (NDP); and **Lorna Marsden**, former Senator (Liberal); each provided their partisan interpretations on debate over the Liberal policy of Free Trade that was implemented by the Conservatives in the late 1980s.

It was revealing to learn how political strategizing by Conservative insiders around real time poll results turned the electorate in favour of free trade and got them re-elected to implement the FTA.

Wrapping up this session, University of Toronto Political Science Professor **Louis Pauly** reflected on the Canada/U.S. relationship. Speaking as a naturalized American-Canadian, he asserts that the U.S. is not having a “nervous breakdown” as was previously suggested, however, he described his native homeland as always being “crazy.” He blamed this condition on Americans having a problem with the role of government in modern society, which swings between absolute Libertarianism and the adoption of a sharing and caring society similar to Canada’s and other western societies.



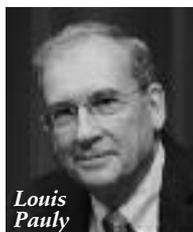
Patrick Boyer



John Brewin



Lorna Marsden



Louis Pauly

University of Toronto History **Professor Robert Bothwell**, talked about his latest contemporary history book: *Your Country, My Country; A Unified History of the United States and Canada*, to be published this fall. He offered insights about how two neighbouring countries that began at war with each other, created the “world’s longest undefended border in the world” – only to have it compromised through inhumane acts and ongoing threats by stateless terrorists from the other side of the world.



Robert Bothwell

International Relations and Defence of the Nation

During the conference, there was appreciation that the footprint Canada left behind in Afghanistan has established Canada’s military as a fighting force to be recognized in the world. Besides Tom Axworthy’s call for defence investment to ward off the Russian bear encroaching on Canadian Arctic territory, it was surprising that there was no specific reference to the role a military capability contributes to defining Canada’s position on the world stage. There was some questioning of Canada’s current role in Syria; and there was a hint at a possible need for military action to deter China from spreading its perceived sovereignty in the South China Sea, with the assumption that Canada would be involved in such a theatre, but on the whole, it seemed that the military was considered an afterthought to foreign diplomacy.

That said, recognition of the need for realignment in foreign affairs that may involve the military option was raised by Janice Stein in her call for “religion” to be

seen as a major construct of foreign policy and, presumably, military strategy.

Having protocols in place for understanding Urban’s methodology for defining “Trust” between and among nations, adds new tools in foreign affairs that, hopefully, do not allow one nation to assume a sense of superiority over another, as may have happened between Canada and Mexico.

This conference provided a stimulating overview of how Canada has gone about cementing its international relations over time – a past that was very much dominated by cold war politics. While partisan banter was an integral part of the conference experience, there was some unanimity across the political spectrum that Canada’s foreign affairs tradition has been fractured under the current regime in Ottawa and will take some time to be restored.

Graham’s explanation of Canada/U.S. relations of the past portrays a culture derived from intellect and reasoning. However, this does not seem to be the energy driving the nation’s global relationships today. In an era when foreign affairs is less polarized, involving the balancing of multi-lateral and bi-lateral global relationships between nations, defining the “enemy” in terms of conventional warfare becomes somewhat redundant. Canada’s traditional foreign affairs model has not been tested in the world of stateless cybercrime or where the enemy is a stateless terrorist group that uses social media to radicalize Canadians at home to go abroad or stay at home to fight against their country.

Be it Omar Khadr, Israel/Palestine, Syrian refugees, Ukraine, or airstrikes against ISIS, the conference gave the impression that such global crises are not being addressed within a traditional foreign policy and defence policy approach. **FLD**

Tim Lynch is a Defence and Maritime Security correspondent based in Toronto.



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