MAPPING CANADA'S WORLD: DEPICTING CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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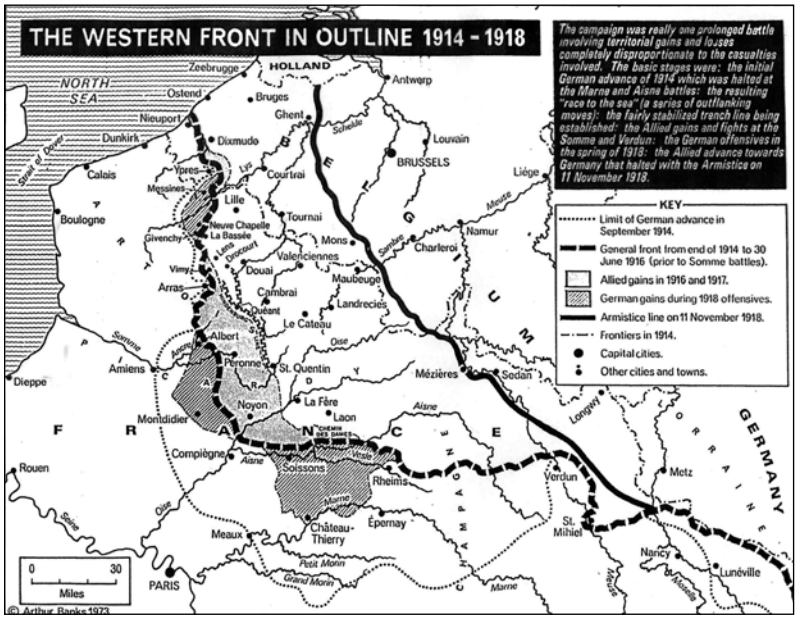
ABSTRACT

Geography—or the perception by Canadians of Canada's place in the world—significantly influenced Canadian foreign policy and the conduct of Canada's international relations in the twentieth century. For Canada, the world beyond its borders—especially Europe and the United States—was vital for immigrants and investments as well as for potential markets for Canadian exports. Its global involvement included military participation in two world wars and lesser conflicts as well as diplomatic engagement, particularly during the cold war. During the twentieth century Canada's horizons widened and its sense of detachment from crises elsewhere diminished, even as the importance of its continental location was reinforced. The dominant trend of the century past, and likely also the century ahead, has been the broadening and deepening of Canadian-American relations. Canada's world today and tomorrow thus poses different challenges and opportunities from those encountered by Canadians and their government in the twentieth century.

In examining Canada's international relations in the twentieth century, it seems appropriate to begin with a quotation from the most successful Canadian political leader of that era, William Lyon Mackenzie King. "If some countries have too much history," King opined, "we have too much geography." In fact, geography—or the perception by Canadians of Canada's place in the world—significantly influenced Canadian foreign policy and the conduct of Canada's international relations in the twentieth century. For Canada, the world beyond its borders—especially Europe and the United States—was vital for immigrants and investments as well as for potential markets for Canadian exports.

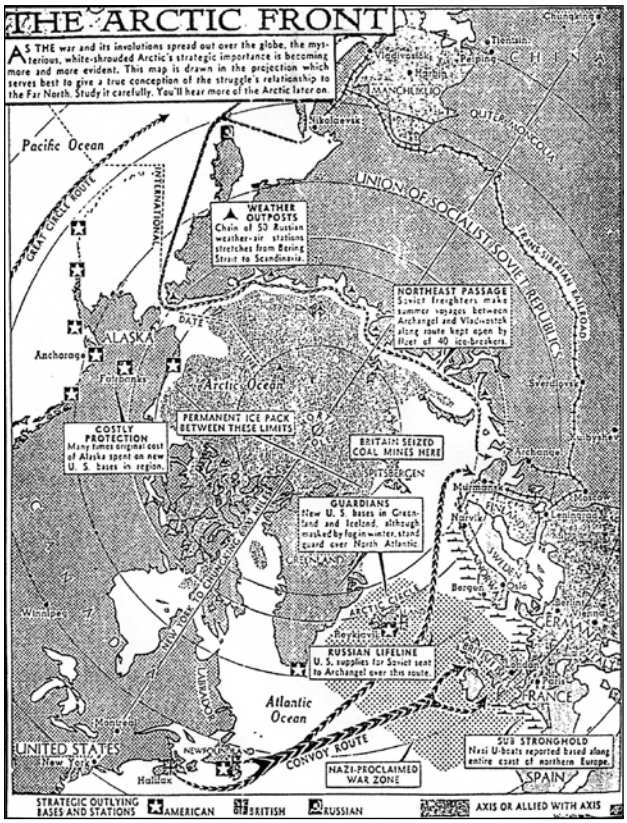
For most Canadians, the salient aspect of their diplomatic and political relationship with the rest of the world at the beginning of the twentieth century was the territorial and material predominance of the British Empire. Membership in the Empire shaped Canada's situation and prospects. Perhaps no image conveyed that so well as the stamp issued with abundant hubris by Canada's post office at Christmas 1898. Rather than the familiar cameo of Queen Victoria, it displayed a map of the world, with the British Empire portrayed boldly in red, the oceans in pale blue, and everything else drab and undifferentiated. Across the bottom was an inspirational inscription: "WE HOLD A VASTER EMPIRE



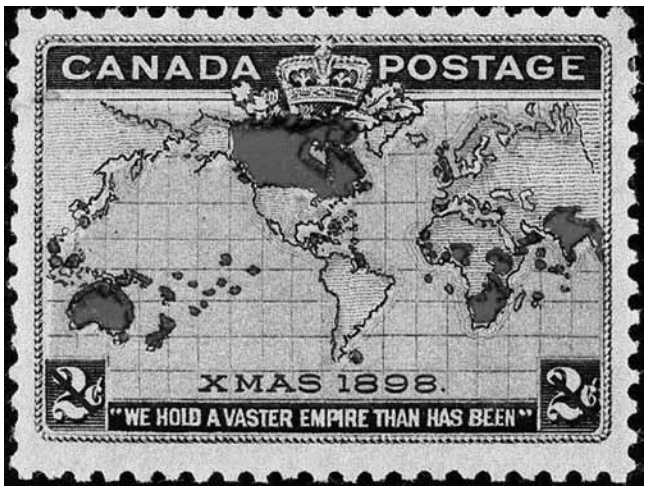
Sources: Da Capo Press, 1988



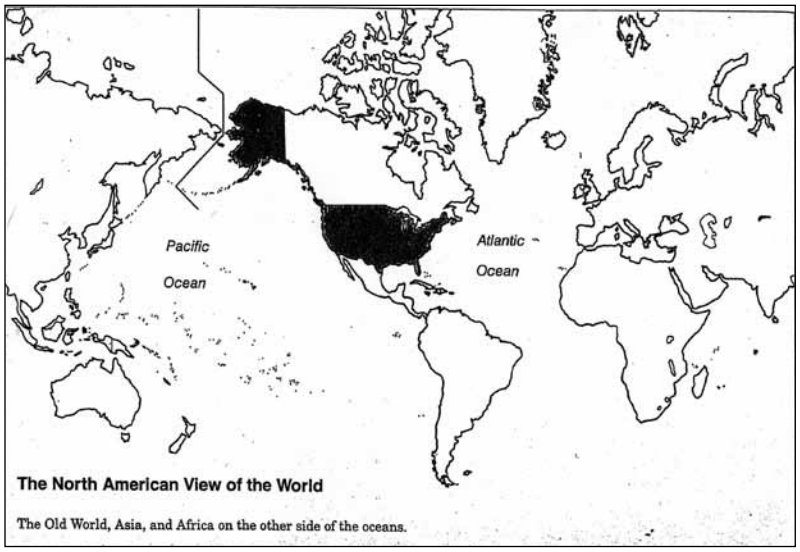
Sources: Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1995



Sources: Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987



Sources: Canadian Postal Museum website: http://www.civilization.ca/cpm/chrono/images/1898a1b.jpg, downloaded on 2/8/03.



Sources: Chaliand and Rageau, *Strategic Atlas*



Sources: Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987

THAN HAS BEEN." That evoked the allegiance of Canadians and their government—or, at least, of the Postmaster General—at the time.

As the twentieth century began, Canadian volunteers, with some support from the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, fought in a distant imperial clash in South Africa. Meanwhile, settlement of the last major territorial controversy between Canada and the United States (over the boundary between Alaska and the Canadian northwest) also had an imperial aspect. The decisive vote of the British member of the arbitration panel conceded the American claim to the critical headlands and inlets of the panhandle that controlled access to the Klondike goldfields. Canadians might grouse about a sacrifice of Canadian interests on the altar of Anglo-American friendship, but no country gained as much from that amity as Canada.

The naval rivalries that preceded and the military escalation and entangling alliances that provoked the Great War seemed distant from Canada's shores. Partisan considerations had complicated the handling of imperial questions before 1914. When war broke out, however, there was no question of neutrality for Canada—unlike its continental neighbour—nor was there doubt about its allegiance. "When the call comes," Laurier affirmed, "our answer goes at once, and it goes in the classical language of the British answer to the call of duty: 'Ready, aye, ready.'" The King's proclamation on behalf of the Empire made clear constitutionally what was obvious politically—when Britain was at war, Canada was at war.

Consequently, another part of the world became very familiar to Canadians. With newspapers vying to explain what was happening (and where) to readers, the people of Canada received a geography lesson. Perhaps most remarkably, the bulk of Canada's army was engaged in combat along entrenched lines that traversed an extraordinarily small tract of land. When Canadian (and Australian) forces spearheaded an offensive that defeated the German Army, they were not far from where they had first taken the field more than three years earlier.

At the Paris Peace Conference, Canadian delegates, as representatives of Canada and members of the British Empire Delegation, were, with victors and vanquished, redrawing the boundaries not only of Europe, but also of the Middle East, Africa, Asia and elsewhere. The Treaty of Versailles included the covenant of a League of Nations, to bring order and stability to world affairs. With no territorial ambitions, minimal interest in reparations and little to gain from collective security, Canada had not much at stake there other than recognition of its international status as a nation. That modest goal was designed to acknowledge its contribution to victory and to offset the disadvantage of imperial nomenclature which obscured differences among self-governing colonies, dominions and independent states. After the war, the horizons of Canada's world might have been broadened by membership in the League of Nations.

But that was not how Canada situated itself on the globe. As evident at successive sessions of the League's assembly, Canada was most interested in status, not responsibility. Membership was not an avenue for international engagement. Canada's imperial bonds may have slackened as greater autonomy was emphasized, but that gradual shift was offset not by another tie to the rest of the world but by rediscovery of the advantages of its continental location, which was contrasted to that of so many other members of the League (notably European states). Canadian speakers often juxtaposed the enlightened tendency of the "New World" (Canada and the US) to settle disputes peacefully by negotiation or arbitration to the belligerent predisposition of countries in the "Old World." Geographic expressions of continental superiority included frequent references to "one hundred years [or more] of peace on the North American continent" and to the "longest undefended border in the world."

Perhaps the most infamous statement of this smugness was a Canadian delegate's explanation of why Canada would not underwrite western Europe's security by signing the Geneva Protocol. As Senator Raoul Dandurand put it, arrangements for collective security among nations were analogous to a "mutual insurance" pact against fire. The risks for Canada were not as great as those of European nations, so that it should not be expected to pay the same premiums. Canadians lived "in a fireproof house, far from inflammable materials."

Less often quoted from that speech—but better explaining Canada's aloof and indifferent interwar policies—is the next passage, stressing that "a vast ocean separates us from Europe," the most likely source of conflagration. *That* is the geographic expression of Canada's outlook in this period. Its cartographic articulation may be found in Canadian school atlases between the wars, with their comforting emphasis on Mercator's projection. That image pleased Canadians for two principal reasons: first, it exaggerated Canada's size, particularly in the North (thus magnifying the territorial advantage over its southern neighbour); secondly, it placed the vast Atlantic and Pacific oceans on either side of Canada, with potentially troublesome Europe and Asia far from Canadian shores.

Canadian policy may have been misguided, irresponsible or simply incoherent as the world confronted (or not) crises in Manchuria and Ethiopia in the 1930s (places about which most Canadians knew or cared little), but it hardly mattered. In his second and last speech to the League's assembly, in September 1936, King chose not to recite the familiar clichés about harmony in Canadian-American relations, nor to preach about the moral superiority of the New World over the Old World. Such lofty condescension was inappropriate in a dangerous world beset by calamities. Instead, King admitted that Canada was in a uniquely favourable location. "We recognise that we in Canada," he acknowledged, "are particularly fortunate both in our neighbours, and in our lack of neighbours, and we agree that we cannot reasonably expect our relations and our attitude to be wholly duplicated elsewhere."

Perhaps appropriately, the most important pronouncements affecting Canada's international relations in the inter-war period involved continental defence. At Queen's University on August 18, 1938, the American president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, affirmed that his country would "not stand idly by if domination of Canadian soil is threatened" by a foreign foe. Two days later, King voiced the "warm appreciation" of Canadians for Roosevelt's pledge. "We too have our obligations as a good friendly neighbour," King attested, "and one of them is to see that, at our own instance, our country is made as immune from attack or possible invasion as we can reasonably be expected to make it, and that, should the occasion ever arise, enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way either by land, sea, or air to the United States across Canadian territory." Even so, it was neither Canada's continental relationship nor its membership in the League of Nations which drew it into the second global conflict of the twentieth century.

Whatever its distance from the immediate clash of arms that commenced the Second World War—and advances in its constitutional status that were underlined by a week of rather ambiguous and remarkably belligerent neutrality—Canada entered that conflict, while the US did not, as a result of its traditional ties to the UK. For Canadians serving overseas as well as for those at home, the European war soon became a world-wide confrontation. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, it transformed popular and official attitudes towards the USSR as well as the prospects for eventual victory, while posing challenges of materially assisting a new ally.

Japan's attacks, notably on Pearl Harbor and on Hong Kong, whose defenders included Canadians, further broadened the struggle and fortified the alliance. The formidable neutral, whose relationship with Britain and Canada had already been close, became a powerful ally. The vulnerability of the British Empire and Commonwealth—and consequent strains for Canada—had prompted extraordinary measures of mutual assistance between a neutral and belligerents, including the "destroyer-bases deal", the Ogdensburg Agreement, Lend-Lease and the Hyde Park Declaration, and many other collaborative military and economic arrangements. With formal American entry into the war, the continental partnership became explicit and wide-ranging, even as its elements were eclipsed by greater and potentially decisive overseas commitments.

As in the Great War, making sense of what was happening abroad—and where it was happening—increased awareness in Canada of otherwise remote and unfamiliar locales. Once more, there was a crash course in geography. For most Canadians—though not necessarily those on the western coast—the principal focus of attention remained Europe and the ominous threat of Nazi Germany. More so than the Great War, the Second World War also brought the overseas conflict to North American shores. U-boats roamed the Atlantic coast and ships were sunk in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Japanese forces invaded islands in the Aleutian chain in the Northeast Pacific. Consequent awareness of unaccustomed vulnerability necessitated a considerable build-up, particularly in Canada's coastal defences, to counteract actual dangers and to reassure Canadians.

Enemy threats and allied needs prompted Canadians to do something that, for a self-described "northern people," albeit mostly settled near Canada's southern border, they so rarely did: look and act northward. When they shifted their gaze to Canada's north, Canadians found that Americans were already there. Even before US entry into the war, a map of the "Arctic Front" published in the *Montreal Gazette* noted the significant American presence in Alaska, as well as US bases in Newfoundland, Greenland and Iceland. This circumpolar projection, the newspaper commented, "serves best to give a true conception of the struggle's relationship to the Far North." As the caption presciently advised, readers should "study" the map "carefully" because they would "hear more of the Arctic later on."

American concerns about protecting Alaska prompted a network of military projects across Canada's northwest. Most were initiated by the US, with its military and civilian personnel in the vanguard. As the range and extent of the activities expanded, however, this considerable foreign but allied presence in an underpopulated part of Canada posed challenges to Canadian sovereignty there. Most of the roads, pipelines, airfields and other establishments were later transferred to Canadian ownership and control on the explicit understanding that this change would not affect operations.

The significance of the Arctic (and of Canada's location generally) was enhanced when the USSR shifted from ally in the Second World War to most likely adversary in a Third World War. Not coincidentally, there was greater attention in Canada's school atlases and elsewhere to circumpolar projections. That map form was much less comforting to Canadians than had been Mercator's projection. The more disquieting depiction, with Canada situated between the US and the USSR, recalled an earlier worry about whether Canada would become "the Belgium of the next world war." One significant difference from the Belgian precedent was that Canada would not be neutral in any clash between the rival superpowers. A principal aim of Canadian policy in the early years of the cold war was to entangle Canada, the US and others (notably the UK and western Europe), in an alliance to deter or thwart any Soviet threat. That objective was overwhelmingly endorsed by Canadian public opinion.

Thus, Canadian fears of annihilation in a global clash trumped sensitivities about protecting national sovereignty. The traditional situation and alignment of Canada in world affairs was expressed geometrically and geographically by the evocative image of a "North Atlantic Triangle." Participating in the United Nations, contributing to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and collaborating to defend North America, Canada assumed responsibilities that it had eschewed a generation earlier. Canada became inextricably entangled in organizations and measures that defended its continent and its region.

Canadians had anticipated that Europe would, as before, be the principal battleground for any global struggle, but the first major clash occurred instead in the Far East. The US government unexpectedly responded forcefully to North Korea's invasion of South Korea and it enlisted UN support for its action. That response and approach enabled the government of Louis St. Laurent, with Lester B. Pearson as foreign minister, to escalate its contribution from a small naval force to significant armed forces consisting predominantly of volunteers. The Korean War and Canadian deeds increased awareness in Canada of that part of the world. It may since be regarded justifiably as Canada's "forgotten war" but for three years it dominated front pages of Canadian newspapers, necessarily illustrated with informative maps.

Canada's next major international engagement under the UN's mantle was prompted by diplomatic efforts to resolve a dangerous conflict and salvage western unity by extracting two traditional allies of Canada—Britain and France—from a treacherous morass into which they had waded. Diplomatic efforts, led by Canada's foreign minister, to settle the Suez Crisis in 1956 ultimately earned Pearson the Nobel Prize for Peace. That singular achievement has inspired Canadian commentators to regard peacekeeping as a Canadian invention and to construct a mythology of Canadian internationalism, dominated by Canada's UN commitments.

That initiative and intervention inspired a succession of later, usually more modest, involvements by Canada in UN missions elsewhere. Indeed, recent critiques of Canadian foreign policy have lamented Canada's unwillingness and/or inability to muster the frequency and level of commitments to peacekeeping (or peacemaking and peace-building) missions that have been viewed since

1956 as hallmarks of Canadian engagement in world affairs. In fact, this participation (and other overseas ventures), often came about directly or indirectly as a result of Canada's partnership in the western alliance. In other words, its UN engagements complemented rather than contradicted or qualified its alignment in the cold war.

Other undertakings by Canada more obviously and explicitly illustrated its geopolitical situation. To meet the Soviet threat to North America, first from long-range bombers and later from inter-continental ballistic missiles, Canada and the US collaborated in measures for continental defence, most notably a series of warning systems and ultimately the North American Air Defence Command (or NORAD). [MAP] Canada's defence and strategic interests—as well as its economy—were effectively integrated with those of the US long before the end of the twentieth century. In its final decade, Canada's most significant military interventions abroad—in the first Gulf War and in the Balkans—were linked to the UN and NATO, though arguably both engagements were ultimately determined by Canada's ties to the US.

When the nineteenth century had closed, Canada's international presence, such as it was, was largely delineated by its membership of the British Empire, and its actual or potential military engagements abroad were likely to derive from that relationship. In all aspects of international affairs, Canada's inter-dependence with the rest of the world has been enhanced by the events and influences of the twentieth century. No major country is more dependent on international investment and trade for its prosperity. Even so, that image (or self-image) as a global nation can be misleading. So much of Canada's international involvement is centred on the continent of North America and the bilateral relationship with the United States, though Canadians are often understandably reluctant to concede the implications of that situation for Canada's options in foreign, trade and defence policy.

The last statement of foreign policy by the Canadian government in the twentieth century was entitled *Canada in the World*. The only illustration accompanying this document was a map of the world on its cover, with some curious features. First, it is a profoundly traditional display in one sense—the nationalist temptation to place Canada in the centre of the world has been resisted for a familiar alignment, with what was formerly known as the Meridian of Greenwich in the middle. Secondly, it is a strange hybrid (a cartographical travesty), involving a flat representation of the whole world squeezed awkwardly onto one visible surface of a sphere. Last but not least, the dominant power in Canada's world at the beginning of the twentieth century has disappeared entirely—the British Isles were sunk without a trace, presumably to simplify the central line of longitude. Whatever the explanation, that would never have been countenanced in 1900.

Notwithstanding this evidence of geographical ignorance, the image was intended to convey the message that, in the words of the inevitable executive summary that introduces Canada in the World, its government was "committed to ensuring that Canada will continue to do its fair share for the world, maintaining our proud and uniquely Canadian contribution to global governance and prosperity." Yet the most distinctive feature of Canada's place in the world, particularly when viewed from abroad—throughout the twentieth century and still in the twenty-first century—has been its proximity to the United States. The dominant trend of the century past, and likely also the century ahead, has been the broadening and deepening of Canadian-American relations. Canada's world today and tomorrow thus poses different challenges and opportunities from those encountered by Canadians and their government in 1900.