GOING GLOBAL?
Exporting 'Security' Post-9/11

BY Dean F. Oliver

CANADA HAS BEEN EXPORTING SECURITY FOR A VERY LONG TIME. SINCE SORTING OUT MOST OF ITS OWN FRONTIER PROBLEMS IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY BY THE COMBINED PROCESSES OF CONFEDERATION, WESTWARD EXPANSION, AND POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION WITH THE UNITED STATES, CANADA HAS BEEN, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, A RELIABLE PARTNER OF THE PRINCIPAL WESTERN POWERS, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES, IN THE BUSINESS OF SECURITY PROJECTION. STEADILY FROM THAT PERIOD, CANADIANS, WHETHER IN IMPERIAL KHAKI, THE POST-UNIFICATION GREEN OF THE TRI-SERVICE CANADIAN FORCES, OR THE POWDER BLUE BERETS AND HELMETS OF UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING FORCES HAVE GONE ABROAD IN SUPPORT OF CANADIAN INTERESTS AT HOME.

This progression from consumer to supplier was neither strictly linear nor chronologically distinct. As late as the 1920s, defence planners still ran war games with Uncle Sam as the opposition, while during the Cold War, American naval, air, space, and intelligence assets protected Canadian sovereignty even as Canadian troops stood shoulder to shoulder with Brits and Belgians, Dutch and Danes in the defence of northern Europe against the Warsaw Pact. Nevertheless, Canadian international security policy shifted over the decades from a fixation on 'homeland defence' (to apply a contemporary phrase to the preoccupations of Montcalm, Brock, and their successors) to what Sean Maloney and other scholars have called 'forward defence', the protection of Canada's growing international interests wherever threats to them were made manifest around the world. Whether defending the Empire against the Kaiser, the world against the Nazis, or central Africa from its own post-colonial malaise and internecine strife, Canadians had clearly moved, intellectually and physically, beyond their own borders to the considered expenditure of blood and treasure around the globe in pursuit of a lengthening list of national objectives. Who in 1899 might have thought that one hundred years later Canadians would shoulder arms in the Balkans in support of a Muslim minority, or in East Timor against the pro-government militias of one of Asia's most populous states? By 1999, however, such deployments were commonplace and, debates over specific missions and Canada's capacity to contribute notwithstanding, widely accepted.

The objectives such deployments supposedly served have, to be sure, evolved, from the obedient fulfillment of colonial obligations in one period to the pangs of humanitarian conscience in another. But all have evinced an inherent, cross-sectional similarity as well as a collective difference from previous Canadian patterns of introspection and pseudo-isolationism. Canadians can yet worry, and for all the right reasons, that a penny-wise foreign policy risks leaving them as so many loud but naked emperors strolling obliviously the world's stage, but they should also recognize the transition that even rhetorical posturing represents. There was a time, after all, when they would not even have bothered, when Europe – or Asia or Africa, for that matter – really was not worth the bones 'of a single Torontonian grenadier.'

Few now would remember fondly such a stance. That war-weariness and exhaustion could breed disinterest and isolationism after 1918 and appeasement after 1931 seemed a logical enough conclusion to those who had lived through the First World War; that such impassiveness in the face of global peril could be catastrophic and the height of political folly was equally logical to those who had survived the Second. As a result, post-war Canada and the other western powers edged steadily towards greater peacetime international cooperation by broad popular consensus, first in the economic and political spheres, and later, amid the hot house atmosphere of the emerging Cold War, in the military sphere as well. It was certainly true, as a generation of Department of External Affairs' spokespersons never tired of saying, that Canada's interests were now intimately connected to events around the world, especially in Europe, but this was by no means as true or as evident in the 1940s and 1950s as it soon would become. A globalizing and increasingly inter-connected world, a multicultural society, and an economy wildly dependent upon exports and international trade were not inimical to the arguments of successive governments that the national interest continued to require support for the United Nations, the world financial system, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. An otherwise well-informed and critical Canadian public, after all, could easily reach the same conclusion. In the latter half of the twentieth century, in other words, Canadian interests really did 'go global' and, for the most part, everybody knew it.

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There remained no shortage of debating points. The precise level of federal spending on national defence or foreign aid, the nature and extent of bilateral relations with odd-sock, ambiguous states like Yugoslavia or India, or even Cuba, the closeness of Canada's relationship with the United States, and the manner in which the effects of global trade should be mitigated by countervailing domestic protections or a national economic policy were – and, for most part, still are – lightning rods for controversy. But on fundamentals the evolution of Canadian international security policy after 1945 reflects a far more consensual course. Diefenbaker, Trudeau, America's Vietnam imbroglio, and the fall of Soviet Communism all administered their shocks, but any serious qualitative assessment of Canadian policies abroad from 1945 to the present cannot fail to be impressed by their essential unity and longevity.

The debate in recent years surrounding the human security project in many ways elucidates the parameters within which Canadian security has long and, on the whole, comfortably been practiced. Canadians, after all, with crotchety old academics in the van, appear to have needed some convincing that human security was a doable proposition, financially or militarily, even as they warmed intuitively to the phrase and expressed – in public opinion poll after public opinion poll – their endorsement of the concept. It was always a grand figment of the imagination, delusional in no small part, to assume that complex diplomatic choreography dropped fully formed from the womb of Canadian altruism, or to posit, however obliquely within the pompous nostrums of public officials, that the good of the commonweal could be dis-

cerned unerringly by the politically self-enlightened or the morally presumptuous. But the project was at least broadly representative of how Canadians seemed likely to think of themselves and, perhaps more importantly, to have themselves thought of by others. Canadians *were* convinced internationalists, whether they liked it or not, and the nature of their internationalism did seem broad enough, in theory at least, to countenance having their responsibility expanded to human as opposed to just state security. How else to account for the impressive dissonance between the minister's academic critics at home (and diplomatic critics abroad) and the generally warm reception accorded the concept by ordinary Canadians? The fact that human security transmogrified too in response to critical assessments by the academy and by Canadian allies brought it even more closely into line with Canadians' self-perceptions. Academics could still complain of the dangers of empty rhetoric and false promises, but in any contest of hearts and minds the protectors of war-affected civilians seemed fated to win every time. Food for the starving made far better copy than the maintenance of close military relations with the United States.

This is hardly to admit that human security's proponents held the field by dint mainly of their own labours. It was, quite simply, an easier sell in the 1990s than in the 1950s, not necessarily because Canadians had ascended to some higher or more righteous moral plane (though for some participants in the debate this was clearly the implication), but simply because Canadians' knowledge base, geo-political circumstances, and national interests made it possible, and often beneficial, to think 'outside the box' in the security equation. The project's backers, having advised first of the revolutionary import of their cause, came belatedly, and under duress, to the idea that Pearsonian traditions connected intimately to contemporary prognoses but, once made, the connections could be mined to considerable advantage. It really was not much of an intellectual leap, in other words, from the essential humanitarianism that underlay Canada's acceptance of Hungarian refugees after 1956 or, in some measure, its international peacekeeping efforts, to the contemporary human security wish list.

But it was a very great leap indeed from the more or less reactive and rhetorical humanitarianism of earlier decades, so suffused – some would say buried – in the politics and programs of national security, Western defence, and the Cold War, to the kinds of aggressive, interventionist, and perhaps even imperialist policies that might make human security a more proactive pursuit. This gap, between broad endorsement of the program's direction and specific enthusiasm for its implications, speaks much of the fundamental sobriety of the Canadian body politic. If human security was a genuine Canadian interest, after all, was war in its pursuit a genuine Canadian interest too?

This is not putting the question too bluntly. It was, in fact, the fundamental question on which, in Kosovo, the security policies of Canada, the United States, indeed the entire Western alliance, very nearly foundered. Writing declaratory checks that sat well with a collective conscience freed from the parameters of the Cold War to play messiah to the world was, in retrospect, an easy business, but restructuring the apparatus of the international system, including its legal regimes and military instruments, in order to make it possible most assuredly was not. Making war in the alleged interests of peace left all the best lines in the hands of anti-war editorial writers. More to the point, a far more basic problem loomed: convincing a skeptical public that global exertions in such causes, up to and including fatal casualties, could meet the test of salience and immediacy once applied to the threats emanating from Wilhelmine Germany, the Third Reich, and the Warsaw Pact. Canadian contributions to the world wars and the Cold War, after all, had been buttressed by the ease with which the 'threat' could be made manifest to the country's stakeholders, its citizens. Support for the Cold War waned, marginally but noticeably, only when European recovery, détente, and the growing illogic of the arms race began to alter public calculations of the necessity for eternal vigilance and the risks inadvertently created as a result. Could human security pass the same test?

The relatively low level of funding allocated to Canada's defence and foreign aid budgets after the early 1960s hardly contradicts the assessment that Canadians understood and accepted that their security had gone global during the Cold War. Instead, to paraphrase the argument once made by historian Desmond Morton, Canadians funded defence when they thought it necessary and lapsed content when they did not. Few seriously countenanced disarmament and few – save the perennially unpopular socialists – countenanced dissociation from the Western bloc, but likewise did few believe that American-like levels of national security spending would be appropriate for a country with more limited interests.

There was much to question in the occasional selfishness of this argument, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the sobriquet of 'freeloader' most closely applies, but also much to admire: acknowledging, funding, and defending, more or less, those assets and interests on which most Canadians could agree secured both internal unity and international respect. The implications of such nation-centric calculi annoyed Canada's key allies to no end, but they nevertheless secured too a certain penumbra of credibility in non-alliance counsels that proved valuable in other contexts. The wisdom of Canada's near-continual creative ambiguity was always open to question, as the legacy of

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such occasionally indecent maneuvering now remains, but the 'helpful fixer', 'middle power', and 'honest broker' roles that Canada carved precariously from the edifice of the Cold War could simply not have come from slavish adherence to the political edicts of American secretaries of state or to the defence funding targets of NATO. There was, clearly, a method to Canada's madness.

The reverse lesson, of course, was also true: that the price of influence remained commitment, and one's interests were rarely defended by default. Critics of Canada's NATO and NORAD ties rejected explicitly such crudely militarist equations, but there is next to no evidence that their qualms, however derived, were widely shared. There is positively no evidence that they ever had a better suggestion. On some key issues, such as the Vietnam War or the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars), the peaceable kingdom declined the penalty of imperial complicity with considerable finesse, and on most others practiced a shrewdly efficacious balancing act. But on others Canadians in some numbers quite simply stood ready to die in the collective defence. The protection of key interests when and where Canadians believed them directly under threat thus remained a cornerstone in the security architecture, even at times when the nature and extent of those threats was controversial. Canada's peacetime military declined steadily, indeed catastrophically, from roughly the mid-1960s onward, but it remained several orders of magnitude larger than the pre-1939 force and still intimately connected in all forms to the military organs of the Western alliance. In most of the security emergencies of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, from Korea to Kosovo, it also took the field alongside its allies, and with full public support. For incorrigible anti-Americanists and the unrepentant left, such disappointing surrenders to the imperial hegemon offered no greater proof of Canada's toadying and embarrassing subservience. But there was at least one other, more straightforward, possibility: the demise of the Cold War notwithstanding, there were limits to the luxuries that time, distance, and a friendly superpower ally could afford. From time to time, Canadians had to stand up and be counted.

September 11 tested sorely each of the three primary conclusions drawn in this brief history of Canada's international security policy since 1945.

First, homeland defence, for long largely a forgotten echo of Canada's pre-industrial, pre-Confederation frontier past, despite the threats temporarily evident during the Second World War and the early stages of the Cold War, returned immediately and with a vengeance to the attention of all Canadians and their government. Canadians now know, thanks to the release of a steady stream of documents and personal memoirs from former Soviet and Warsaw Pact intelligence operatives, that unconventional threats to their infrastructure, industrial capacity, and public safety were every bit as great as their under-funded, long-suffering intelligence agencies had long warned. But these were threats, aside from peacetime espionage, that could only have been made manifest in wartime, when the global stakes would have made acceptable the risks to Moscow of exposing the Soviet Union's long-nourished network of sabotage plans and sleeper agents. They were hardly the ongoing concern of the broad Canadian public that, in the wake of Vietnam and riding the high tide of the irreverent Trudeau revolution, were far more inclined to disbelieve the gloomy prognoses of their security officials in any case.

For the most, the period from at least the late 1960s witnessed an ever-widening gap between the apparent requirements of security precautions abroad (which themselves were, especially in the eyes of Canada's disappointed allies, increasingly token) and the tangible evidence of potentially mortal perils at home. Canadians had learned to live with the bomb, however reluctantly, and the testing of territorial waters or continental airspace by Soviet submarines and long-range bombers respectively was a recurrent media footnote, hardly a going public concern. In recent years, and in large part due to the growing vulnerability of information systems, communications networks, and public services to interruption or damage from electronic sabotage, whether juvenile mischief-makers or genuine cyber-terrorists, Canadian officials have taken far more seriously the risk of catastrophic damage to the country's "critical infrastructure" and taken important steps to guard against such possibilities. But until 9/11 such discussions were not fundamental parts of any public discourse on security, most components of which seemed comfortable with a minimal security establishment that would continue to contribute in predictable ways to multilateral security missions abroad.

The second important point is that 9/11 has raised serious questions about the wisdom or effectiveness of the kinds of passive, reactionary security policies practiced, with broad public support, through much of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. A 'watch tower' defence, even encompassing civil defence measures, peacetime mobilization, coastal defence, and civilian defence industrial mobilization in a long-war scenario, never contemplated the random, multi-directional acts of terror in peacetime that are the hallmark of modern-day fundamentalist terrorist groups. Nothing in Canada's long involvement with international peacekeeping or, of late, peacemaking suggested that this home front paradigm would soon change either. It also appears highly unlikely that models of rational behavior, crisis decision-making, negotiable objectives, or military threat perceptions and vertical or horizontal escalation, all derived principally from the state-centric Cold War security template, will apply with anything more than sporadic utility to the West's dialogue with terrorist groups. Nor do existing legal norms, whether national or international, easily apply. The concept of deterrence, for example, might yet have validity in a broadly based strategy to combat international terrorism (or international crime or intra-state violence), but assessing its modalities and mustering sufficient national and international staying power to make them work, in the absence of easily discernable firewalls or threat points, will make the process an extremely challenging one. Quite simply, against whom

would the façade of preparedness and willingness to act be projected?

This, in turn, raises serious questions about the ability of external actors to effect, by any means short of the application of carefully targeted but deadly violence, the behavior of highly dedicated, fanatically inspired opponents, many of whose weapons are suicidal warriors. Whether social and economic factors, many of them sub-national or sub-regional, can systematically be acted upon in the long term to undermine or counteract the wellsprings of anti-Western terrorism is an important avenue to explore, and for which funding, patience, and international collaboration are all richly warranted, but it is also very largely a moot point. Technological trends alone are pointing to the possession by terrorist groups of far more lethal and indiscriminant threats to Western interests in the very near future, certainly far sooner than foreign aid or a good press on the Arab 'street' could reasonably be expected to forestall, even in the most wildly optimistic scenario. There is every possibility, in other words, that the danger to Western interests will get worse before it gets better, even assuming that Western governments could gradually erode the societal bases for terrorist support in regions like the Middle East.

And third, in light of the doctrines and methods likely to be most effective in responding to these changes, especially the challenges of time and distance in counter-terrorist operations, 9/11 has called seriously into question the size, configuration, and mission of Canada's armed forces as they enter the next millennium. Not only must the military and other security forces face the possibility of assuming far broader, more onerous, and more intrusive domestic security responsibilities, but they must also face the corresponding possibility that both the watch tower defence of the Cold War, with its ponderous mobilization base, and the peacekeeping infrastructure that has correspondingly evolved, might be equally ill-suited, by temperament and by design, to certain security functions necessary in the military actions of the next millennium. One must be careful here not to overstate the case for change, or to assume that the 'lessons' of 9/11 are easily discerned, much less that they point all in the same direction. But it is at least conceivable, perhaps even probable, that 9/11 will serve to aggravate materially the Canadian Forces' requirement for capabilities that include rapidly deployability, special forces, light infantry, fast air and sealift, intelligence gathering and dissemination, close air support, and forced insertion and extraction expeditionary scenarios. It is equally possible that a vastly expanded and differently configured intelligence apparatus, of the sort that appears to be emerging at some speed in the United States, will be necessary and desirable here. None of these are minor alterations in the essential fabric of the Canadian national security state. None are cheap. None certainly are cost-free in either financial or political terms.

But neither are they inevitable. Now, as at the onset of the Cold War or after the fall of France in 1940, when the complexion of Canada's Second World War inexorably changed, Canadians face a scenario that appears for the moment radically different than that with which they had grown comfortable, in this case for more than five decades. It may, in the end, prove an illusory threat, blown out of proportion globally by the tactical but spectacular success of the bin Laden terrorist group on a single unfortunate day, but it is at least plausible that the reverse will prove true, that the threat will not prove ephemeral. It is at least plausible, in other words, that Canada is moving into the third broad phase of its security history, a period in which homeland defence and international security are in fact closely fused into a more intrusive, more proactive, and more interventionist suite of capabilities than most governments in any previous era would have recognized, or willingly condoned. If so, the long-term implications of 9/11 shall have been very great indeed.

Still, it is important to recall the point at which this analysis began: if there is any truth in the hypothesis that the salience and immediacy of threat, and not mere rhetorical appeals to high mindedness and self-interest, has been the motivator for considerable and long-term Canadian commitments to the security project, it is possible, even likely, that with 9/11 this country has turned a significant corner. The current fusion in the popular mind between the necessity for consuming extra security at home and exporting generous dollops abroad, and the immediate links between the two, is therefore almost unique in Canadian history. But Canadians' capacity to alter this view, to reformulate their interests and their comfort level with their own security establishment and its demands on the public purse, has not diminished. September 11 is also slipping from the realm of current affairs and into that of history. And in the latter realm, the popular memory can play great tricks.

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