CANADA AND ITS WORLD

BY Desmond Morton

ONE WAY TO REFLECT ON CANADA AND ITS WORLD IS TO LEVER UP OUR LAND MASS AND TRY TO FIND A PLACE FOR IT SOMEWHERE ELSE ON THE GLOBE. IT'S A BIT OF A CHALLENGE, REALLY. FINDING SPACE FOR ALMOST TEN MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES IS NO JOKE. ABOUT THE ONLY CONCEIVABLE HOLE WOULD BE SOMEWHERE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE. CHANCES ARE THAT THE CLIMATE WOULD NOT BE A GREAT IMPROVEMENT. STILL, IMAGINE WAKING UP WITH INDIA, AUSTRALIA OR ARGENTINA, OUR ONE-TIME COMPETITOR FOR THE UPPER SLOPES OF PROSPERITY, AS NEAR NEIGHBOURS. BUT DON'T WORRY. GIVEN ITS GLOBAL REACH, CULTURAL ENERGY AND CORPORATE POWER, THE UNITED STATES WOULD STILL BULK LARGE ON OUR HORIZON.

Wouldn't that have been the point of moving? Or, for others, the best argument for moving back to the old location? "So far from God," complain Mexicans, "and so near to the U.S.A." But consider the options for so huge and under-populated a country. With a polar icecap and two broad oceans to insulate us, Canada has been invulnerable on three sides since the Royal Navy our defender in 1760. For close to half a century we lay between two bitterly hostile super powers and nothing worse dropped on us than some radioactive debris from a Soviet satellite.

Since First Nations times, our vulnerable frontier has been the bottom side. In the 1860s, the U.S. Civil War finally convinced the British that they would lose any future War of 1812. They helped us confederate and pulled out, pledging that if Canada "would devote all her resources, both in men and in money" to defend the British connection, the British accepted a reciprocal obligation. Canadians know what happened to our side of the deal. Our politicians sensibly agreed that war with the United States was unthinkable. Instead of arming for a hopeless struggle, Ottawa committed a million dollars a year for a 40,000-member volunteer militia capable of dispersing rural rioters. Out west, Sir John A. Macdonald created a mounted police so that U.S. cavalry would not be tempted to keep order up here. Instead of buying fortresses and heavy artillery, Ottawa gave us a peace dividend big enough to build railways from Halifax to Vancouver. Most Canadians forgot all about soldiering. Peace-loving immigrants fled old world conscription to find peaceful homes for their families. Ultimately, even Britain and France shared the benefits because, with Canada safe, hundreds of thousands of Canadian soldiers, sailors and pilots came to their defence.

In the summer of 1940, after the fall of France, Canada suddenly ranked second to Great Britain in war against Hitler's Third Reich. When the implications of this horrifying reality finally dawned on our prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King dialled the White House. Two days later, on August 18, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in Ogdensburg. By nightfall, the two leaders had approved a "Permanent Joint Board of Defence" to manage continental security. When Japan destroyed the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, American troops flooded into the Yukon to link Edmonton and Alaska by road. U.S. engineers built airfields and

pipelines across the Arctic. After a visit, the British High Commissioner persuaded Ottawa to appoint a commissioner, buy him a DC-3 and show our flag. After the war, Ottawa bought up every airfield and a thoroughly impassable Alaska Highway to extinguish U.S. claims. Old suspicions were not allayed by wartime dealings with Washington.

Still, the PJBD was permanent. When revelations of Soviet espionage in Ottawa helped segué Canadians from the Axis defeat into a Soviet-American Cold War, the polar cap looked thinner than before the era of airpower. In 1947, Canada agreed to Americanize its armed forces in doctrine, training, equipment and style. More dependent on the latest technology than on old traditions, Canada's navy and air force embraced the U.S. linkage enthusiastically. The army was slower. In Korea, our soldiers served under a British-led Common-wealth Division. In 1951, our brigade joined the British Army of the Rhine, though the air force and navy joined American commands. Ottawa's price for an American-built Distant Early Warning (DEW) line across the North was belated recognition of Canada's Arctic sovereignty. Generations later, that left us with the bill for clean-up.

Early in the PJBD days, a shrewd general, Maurice Pope, warned that Americans would demand a higher standard of defence than most Canadians thought necessary. In 1957, a newly-elected John Diefenbaker agreed to a North American Air Defence Command (NORAD), allowing a U.S. general to make the split-second decision about what to tell the President when NORAD radars spotted Soviet bombers, missiles or merely overweight geese. On off days, a Canadian deputy might choose. Acceptable when the veteran Dwight D. Eisenhower occupied the White House, Diefenbaker drew the line at his lecherous young successor, John F. Kennedy. After the Cuban missile crisis, Lester Pearson's loyalty to the alliance broke up Diefenbaker's government and let our Liberals rule for sixteen uninterrupted years. Bad vibes from the Reagan White House because of Pierre Trudeau's peace-grandstanding helped make Brian Mulroney our prime minister in 1984. "Good relations, perfect relations with the United States," purred Brian, were his top priority.

Canadians should never exaggerate party differences. A Trudeau-chosen royal commission gave Mulroney the arguments for his historic Free Trade Agreement with the United States. A Liberal leader, John Turner, turned the 1988 election into a referendum on the FTA rather than on Tory sleaze. Tory plans for nuclear-powered submarines to patrol our Arctic faded because the Pentagon wanted our Arctic waters restricted to American submarines. Other people decided how best to defend us.

After the Cold War collapsed, what was the case for Canadian defence? What was the threat? Did U.S. paranoia about North Korea, Iran and Iraq make Canada a likely target? One of Chrétien's many defence ministers came home from a NORAD briefing shaking with laughter. The North Koreans, he reported, had a "dong". Still, we were linked to a superpower. Trouble anywhere – the break-up of Yugoslavia, massacres and misgovernment in Africa, aggression in the Persian Gulf – was our trouble.

As sole surviving superpower, Americans reluctantly accepted the obligation to "project power" wherever needed. Fearful of fresh Vietnams, mindful of hundreds of marines killed in the Beirut bombings, the Pentagon turned to hyper high-tech for solutions. A "Revolution in Military Affairs" or RMA linked radar, global positioning systems, radar and high-speed telecommuni-cations to locate, target and destroy enemies with minimum manpower and risk. Republicans and Democrats alike met the costs by cuts in social spending and in conventional forces.

In Canada, Trudeau's 1974 budget had cut taxes, indexed social spending and created a spiralling deficit the Mulroney government refused to control. One of many cost-cutting gestures condemned the Canadian Forces to let weapon systems from the 1960s rust out. By the 1990s, a huge annual deficit undermined the dollar and threatened Canada's economy. Buying American from the gold-plated U.S. defence industry with 65 cent dollars undermined already inadequate capital budgets while feeding an over-dependence on U.S. markets. Going global to most Canadian exporters meant crawling up the biggest, fattest spoke in the wheel, not going to Europe or Asia.

In 1993, when Jean Chrétien's new Liberal government finally addressed the deficit, defence spending was a major target for cuts. Two years earlier, Vice-Admiral Charles Thomas, vice-chief of the Canadian defence staff, offered a plan: maintain the navy and air force because they had some new equipment. Scrap the army, which had none. Focussed on peacekeeping, from Cyprus to Croatia to Oka, Canada's soldiers had become a camouflage-clad constabulary. Thomas was put out to pasture. Chrétien's 1994 defence policy talked of forces "fit to fight the best, along side the best," but most defence capital spending in the 1990s concentrated on keeping our CF-18s fighters and twelve new patrol frigates interoperable with their American counterparts. When Canada sent forces to the U.S.-led war in the Gulf in 1990 or the 1999 bombing campaign in Kosovo, CF-18s led the way and Canadian warships lay offshore. Any soldiers did guard duty. Total defence spending dropped to $9 billion and then climbed to $12 billion after media reports that service members delivered pizza and needed food banks forced a pay raise. Canadians told pollsters in 2001 that Canada's forces were under-sized but they had no desire to spend more on them. What was the need?

On September 11, a handful of terrorists provided an answer. Brilliant in its horror, novelty and simplicity, 9-11 sent a wave of panic, confusion and dismay across North America. President George W. Bush responded that anyone who was not with the United States in combatting terrorism was an ally of terrorists. By September 14, Congress gave him authority and funds. Thousands of innocent dead and the vengeful outrage of the world's superpower produced startling unanimity from the world. Accustomed to "best friend" status in Washington, Canada found itself in a humiliating race to prove its loyalty. Added to appropriate sympathy was the practical fear that enhanced U.S. border security might close down 80 percent of Canada's for-

eign exports.

In 1990, Liberal leader Jean Chrétien had been harshly critical of Brian Mulroney's "Ready, Aye, Ready" response to American leadership in the Gulf War. In 2001, six ships, not three, headed for the Arabian Sea. New frigates escorted the U.S. carrier fleet assembled to punish Afghanistan for harbouring terrorists. Almost unnoticed, Canada's top-secret Second Joint Task Force joined American special forces near Kandahar. When AP photographers caught members of 2JTF delivering prisoners to the Americans, not even Canada's national newspaper knew who they were.

Could Canada do more? A U.N. mandated, British-run security force in Kabul was an obvious opportunity – but the British already had too many white, Christian soldiers for a delicate task. Pressure on the Pentagon allowed the same regiment that provided rogue paratroopers for Somalia, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, to send a battalion to Kandahar. Lacking desert camouflage, their green uniforms at least marked them as Canadian.

Did this make Canada, or even North America, safe from terrorism? Many citizens argue that it does the opposite. The fanaticism that fed al Qaeda – or Hamas, the IRA, or the Tamil Tigers – with self-immolating recruits grows from the desperation of relentless injustice. It thrives in the gap between rich and poor. It prospers when powerful corporations extract wealth and leave poverty behind. Does Afghanistan's latest war and foreign-protected regime really offer hope? Can prisoners in cages at Guantanamo Bay avoid becoming martyrs?

Such arguments have little currency now, but they will grow as the outrage of September 11 inevitably fades. History takes longer than television's attention span.

We are warned that the so-called Terrorist War will be long unless, by mutual consent, we change the language. Perhaps we should. Calling the anti-terrorist struggle a war met an emotional need but we need another word. Wars, even bitter ones, have beginnings, ends and mutually accepted rules. Terrorists are not soldiers but, as Michael Ignatieff has argued, the exact opposite, removed from discipline, rules and even the concept of non-combatants. In Britain's long struggle with the IRA, the historian Michael Howard recalls, Whitehall consistently refused to grant IRA terrorists combatant status, despite U.S. pressure. Fighting terrorists, Howard reminds us, requires accurate, rapid information, preferably from willing sources. An alternative is the marriage of an unfettered police and modern electronics. Here lies the September 11 threat to our freedom.

September 11 finally led many Canadians to recognize the limits of their armed forces. The pretext was understandable but fostered by the president's war talk and misleading. Federal spending on anti-terrorist security offered little to the Canadian Forces beyond doubling the mysterious 2JTF and covering costs associated with Canada's support for American reprisals against Afghanistan.

In February, Ottawa finally promised a defence review, eight years after Jean Chrétien promised forces able to "fight the best alongside the best." That promise was not kept. Selected ships and aircraft can serve under American command but Canada's tradition of autonomous command is abandoned. Collective exercises cost too much. The army no longer has combat-capable long-range guns and tanks. The Coyote, a Canadian-built wheeled light-armoured reconnaissance vehicle, is a lonely reminder of past prowess. With official strength cut from 83,000 to only 59,000 men and women, real regular force strength is much smaller. Exasperated by low pay, repeated overseas deployments and family stress, thousands have quit. An urgent recruiting drive is an inefficient solution.

Will a fresh review help? Ottawa veterans expect fresh deceptions, more cuts to bone and sinew and bundles of last-year slogans from the corporate world. True believers are cynics with ambition for higher rank.

Ironically, their allies may be American. Only the United States can force Ottawa to improve the Canadian Forces. President Bush's ambassador to Ottawa, former Massachusetts governor Paul Cellucci, has bluntly warned Canadians that they must carry more weight in the defence alliance, or find themselves left outside the latest Fortress America. Canadians who might prefer the latter choice should look closely at New Zealand, a country which, whatever its rhetoric, distanced itself from ANZUS, pruned its forces and vanished into South Pacific marginality. The example is worth studying.

It also has limited relevance. Canadians don't live in the South Pacific, as we reminded ourselves earlier. Canadians have agreed to integrate our defences with the United States for over half a century. Our soldiers had no trouble figuring out the chain of command in Kandahar, whatever was going on with Art Eggleton or Jean Chrétien. Disentangling is always possible, but the economic and social tentacles are jungle-dense and pain-sensitive. Until the 1940s, the British used to be agents for Canadian military efficiency. Ambassador Cellucci was only the latest American to remind our generals, admirals and military lobbyists where influential friends can now be found. Big decisions are waiting. Soldiers wonder whether we will have an army with tanks or merely special forces, on the edge of legality, like 2 JTF. The air force wonders whether we will transport our forces in Canadian aircraft or trust our men and women to Russian or Ukrainian planes. As the CF-18 nears the end of its operational life, the Pentagon has chosen the American replacement fighter. British, French and German air forces are weighing their options if they, too, want to be "interoperable". Will we take twenty more years?

In 1914, Canada was still a colony of the British Empire. When Britain's ultimatum to Berlin expired at midnight on August 4, Canada was at war with the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. On September 14, 2002, Congress approved President George W. Bush's war. Perhaps buoyed by a *National Post* opinion poll showing 80 per cent support for backing the U.S. with troops, our prime minister agreed. Parliament did not decide. But Canada is not a colony, is it?

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