



Canada and the New American Empire

Project Description

Project Rationale

Canada confronts a global situation unlike any it has faced before. Some academics have characterized these circumstances as the “age of unipolarity”.

No country is more directly affected by the rise of the United States to pre-dominance than Canada. No country is more closely connected to the United States by history, by commercial ties and by elements of a common culture than Canada. In a unipolar world, this is at once a major advantage and potentially a significant danger for a country which seeks to make its own way forward as a prosperous, humane society with a distinctive set of national values.

From its birth as a country, Canada has faced the challenge of having a more populous, militarily stronger neighbour possessed of an entrenched sense of its national destiny. Over time, Canada has generally benefited from the economic dynamism of the United States, and for the most part has managed to avoid the more painful impacts of American exceptionalism. Although it may be true, as Lipset and others suggest, that the organizing principles that frame the two countries are quite different, it is also true that the deeper commonalities (most notably a commitment to democracy and the rule of law) which Canada and the U.S. share have bound Canadians and Americans together quite as much as geography.

The last major public debate in Canada on the future of the relationship with the United States occurred around the Free Trade Agreement in the nineteen eighties. In the short term, the 1988 election apparently settled matters, but the subterranean argument rumbled on. Specific events such as the tragedy of 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the occasional power black-out, have served to remind Canadians of how closely the two countries are tied.

Events appear to be driving Canada again in the direction of decision-making with respect to the United States. At least partially in response to the understandable security concerns of Americans in the wake of 9/11, the Bush Administration has chosen a more value-laden, unilateralist approach to foreign and defense policy. Canada's need to develop a creative response to this broad assertion of American power will be heightened

if George Bush is re-elected, but given Americans' current sense of vulnerability, even a Democratic President will be difficult to deal with. Canada's circumstances will not be simplified, for example, if the United States retreats into isolationism and protectionism in reaction to a dangerous world.

Beyond this significant external impetus, Canadians have reasons of their own to re-examine the country's relationship with the United States. Already American concerns for greater border security have cast doubt on the extent to which the integration of the Canadian and American economies can be maintained, let alone intensified. After an initial burst of greater trade and investment after the conclusion of FTA and NAFTA, the logic of consolidating gains through either customs union or monetary union or both requires careful examination. The energy relationship between Canada and the U.S. could be characterized as a piece of unfinished business in the absence of an institutional framework or a common understanding of continental objectives. Lurking over the horizon (and probably not very far) is the set of issues related to water. In its rawest form, the U.S. is running out of water as populations and uses expand, and aquifers contract; Canada sits close by with what appears to be a bountiful supply of water and no immediate needs. Managing this emerging flash-point will not be straightforward, especially given the differential regional impact and the jurisdictional complexity involved.

Finally, Canada has changed considerably in the past twenty years. A new generation with no direct memory of Vietnam, let alone the Second World War, will no doubt have different views of the importance of the U.S. relationship. So will those millions of urban Canadians originally from Asia and developing countries, for whom the traditional historical context for Canada-U.S. relations is learnt rather than inherited. For this as for other major national issues, it may be past time to develop a new national calculus for determining the locus of Canadian interests.

Project Objectives

- To encourage informed public debate about the future of Canada's relations with the United States
- To focus attention on a number of critical policy areas which can be expected to shape the bilateral relationship in the next ten to fifteen years
- To generate innovative options for or approaches to the relationship as a whole and these policy areas in particular
- To provide governments and leaders of civil society in Canada with a better sense of the views of Canadians across the country on these important subjects

Broadening the Debate

An important aspect of the mandate of the Centre for Global Studies is to engage the public in promoting awareness of global issues. Because the way in which Canada conducts its relations with the U.S. will affect so many Canadians directly, it is particularly appropriate that the choices facing the country in this regard should be

canvassed as broadly as possible. Simply put, this subject is too important to be left to the experts.

With this perspective in mind, the Centre has sought a partnership with a component of the national broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). This project falls comfortably within at least two major components of the CBC's mission statement – to tell Canadian stories reflecting the reality and the diversity of our country, and to inform Canadians about news and issues of relevance and interest – and the Centre is pleased that CBC Newsworld has decided to work with it as a media partner to reach as wide an audience as possible.

The critical challenge for this project is to devise ways to marry subject area expertise with more general considerations related to national values and long-term national interests. Otherwise expressed, the question is how to trigger a fruitful conversation among individuals who think about Canada-U.S. relations for a living and members of the public who have only episodic contact with any of these matters. The methodology proposed seeks to meet this requirement for generating an insightful interplay between credible expert advice and less systematically expressed popular concerns and aspirations.

Project Methodology

The project has three stages – a conference organized by the CFGS in collaboration with CBC Newsworld, Newsworld television programming based largely on the conference, and legacy items related to the project.

Stage 1 – Conference at the University of Victoria

The CFGS will organize a conference to discuss the critical policy areas which can be expected to shape the Canada-U.S. relationship in the next ten to fifteen years. The conference will focus on four aspects of bilateral relations – security, water, energy, and economic integration. Because the last topic is so broad, the decision has been made to concentrate on proposals for customs or monetary union as issues which might increase progressively in importance within the ten to fifteen year timeframe under consideration.

The CFGS will commission a collection of eight to ten briefing notes on each of these key issue areas. All of these issues are likely to generate strong views around the extent, pace and implications of the trend towards greater integration between Canada and the United States. The intention is to seek information about contrasting sides of the argument to ensure as representative and lively a debate as possible, while maintaining the emphasis on practical alternatives. The briefing note format has been chosen to encourage economy and directness of expression.

Over thirty individuals are providing 4 to 6-page briefing notes and attending the conference. Within the context of broad choices around integration, each note summarizes the main challenges facing Canada in one of the four fields over the next ten

to fifteen years. The notes assess when these challenges will affect Canada, what their national and regional impacts will be, what options Canada has in dealing with them, and what the costs and benefits are of the main choices facing the country. Writers are recognized experts in their field.

CBC Newsworld will work with these writers to produce documentary material for use at the conference and in follow-up television programming. The written material provided by the authors will be made available in advance to conference participants and incorporated into the subsequent publication mentioned below.

Four speakers will be addressing the conference on various aspects of the Canada-U.S. relationship:

- Paul Heinbecker, former Ambassador of Canada to the United Nations, current Director of the Laurier Centre for Global Relations, Governance and Policy, and Senior Research Fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation;
- Hugh Segal, President, Institute for Research on Public Policy;
- David Zussman, Executive Vice-President and CEO, EKOS Research Associates;
- Jim Balsillie, Chairman and CEO, Research in Motion.

The conference will have a significant youth component.

- CFGS and CBC Newsworld will manage a competition directed at Canadians under the age of twenty-five. They will be asked to submit a 10-page paper on the issue they believe will be most critical in terms of the future relationship between Canada and the United States. The papers will be adjudicated by CFGS and Newsworld, and the winning writer will receive a cash prize and be invited to participate in the Victoria conference.
- Approximately one quarter of the seats at the conference will be set aside for university and college students.
- Newsworld is designing an interactive website component related to the conference which younger viewers should find attractive.

Conference participation will be by invitation and will be limited to approximately 100 people knowledgeable in the fields under discussion. Every effort will be made to ensure that a full range of opinion on these important subjects is canvassed. The restricted size of the gathering is intended to facilitate a fruitful exchange of views. The conference proceedings will be filmed by CBC Newsworld. The footage will then provide the basis for subsequent television programming. The starting point for discussion will be the briefing notes and related short documentaries.

The conference will take place over the weekend of November 26 to 28, 2004. It will be held on the campus of the University of Victoria. CFGS staff will provide secretariat services for the meeting. A draft conference program is attached

Stage 2 – CBC Newsworld television programming

CBC Newsworld is developing a four-part series for broadcast in early December 2004. The first two parts will focus on the conference's four issue areas – part one on water and energy, part two on security and economic integration. The programs will be in similar documentary style. They will incorporate the short documentary screened at the conference, highlights from conference discussion and debate, and “field tape” gathered during the preparation of the documentary segments.

The third part will reflect the summary session of the conference. That session will be structured as a “counterSpin-style” townhall with a CBC host (to be determined) as the moderator. The fourth and final part of the series will be a live townhall after the conference with a diverse studio audience, panelists (including U.S. guests) and an interactive phone-in/email-in component.

Complementary programming is planned for CBC Radio as part of the *Ideas* series.

Stage 3 – Legacy items

The CBC Newsworld programming described above (perhaps including excerpts from the preceding conference) will be collected onto an edited DVD. Speeches and briefing notes from the conference will be collected into a book with a suitable introduction and conclusion. The DVD and book will be packaged together for general sale, government, school and university use.

CBC Newsworld will provide its programming to the PBS network in the United States. CFGS and the CBC will investigate the possibility of encouraging similar activities in the United States and Mexico, with a view to generating eventually a continent-wide consideration of the issues facing the people of the three NAFTA countries.

Contact information

Peter Heap
Senior Research Associate
Centre for Global Studies
University of Victoria
250-721-8782
pheap@uvic.ca