

BOOK EXCERPT

A Brave New Canada in an Uncertain World

Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson

The past quarter-century has produced dramatic changes in the global geopolitical landscape. From the fall of the Berlin Wall to the collapse of the Soviet Union to the economic rise of China and the contagion of Islamic fundamentalism, events have shaken the order that prevailed for the second half of the 20th century in ways that are still playing out. For the United States in particular, the impact has been significant. For Canada, that reality will be key to our role in the world.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was intended as satire but there is nothing satirical about the need for Canada to be brave in meeting the challenges of a dramatically changing world.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and then the Soviet Union more than 20 years ago, then-US President George H.W. Bush predicted that the world was on the cusp of a "New World Order." To other pundits, in the memorable phrase of the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, we had also reached "the end of history" with the collapse of the Soviet Union and communist regimes in Eastern Europe. At the time, there appeared to be no attractive alternative to western-style democracy and market economies and the values that go with both. Yet, in what is surely a relatively brief passage of time when measured by the broader sweep of history, much has changed in our world. We are neither at the end of history nor has a new world "order" emerged. In fact, there seems to be more chaos and turbulence than ever before.

China, which had quite self-consciously eschewed the Soviet model of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, but nonetheless embraced western-style capitalism under one-party rule, has risen to become the second largest economy in the world. The United States, which like a young and vigorous David stood over the fallen Soviet Goliath when the Berlin Wall came crashing down, has suddenly become the world's "weary titan." It is showing many of the symptoms of imperial decline and "overstretch" that Great Britain displayed at the end of the 19th century.

Europe, which picked itself up after the ravages of the Second World War and embarked upon one of the most ambitious strategic enterprises in history—political and economic consolidation leading to the formation of the European Union so that Europeans would never fight themselves again—is faltering under the weight of massive public debt and the ravages of a serious financial meltdown that shows few signs of abating because the political will to drive needed policy solutions is simply not there.

In the triumphalism that accompanied the end of the Cold War little thought was given, save by a few Cassandras, to the threat posed to global stability by the unrelenting assaults from extremist Islamic factions, most evident the events of 9/11 but spreading ever since beyond Afghanistan to the always volatile Middle East and North Africa. Although many left-wing critics at the time derided the great conservative American thinker, Samuel P. Huntington, his prediction in the mid-1990s that we were about to witness a "clash of civilizations" between the dark forces of Islamic extremism and the West proved to be singularly prophetic, as Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda acolytes



launched a day of devastating terrorist attacks on American soil on the key symbols of American prosperity and power. These climactic events, and especially the financial meltdown and prolonged recession that began in the last decade, have had a deleterious effect on America's capacity and inclination to lead on global challenges. They have shaken confidence, too, in the values of pluralism, liberty, and tolerance that underpin western-style democracies. Equally, they have diluted the tone and many of the sinews of US relations with key allies, including Canada. Personal relations at the top and the informal cooperative spirit among senior officials have suffered in the process as well. Relations may be correct, but they are no longer warm. The US approach to allies is now less magnanimous.

In the absence of a single threatening power like the Soviet Union, the US feels that it no longer needs close allies and has begun to return to its pre-Wilsonian default of isolationism, or narrow self-interest. No country is more affected by this change than Canada. While there is little evidence of a new order or that we have reached the "end of history," what is palpable is that the tectonic geopolitical and economic plates of the world are shifting, setting in motion powerful forces that are shaking the postwar world to its very foundations.

Alas, there has been precious little analysis of what these changes mean for Canada, our place in the world, and our strategies for global engagement. Many pundits are caught in a time warp of the 1960s and 1970s. To some degree, Canadians can be forgiven for their lack of interest in international affairs because they have been fed a steady diet of bromides that suggest that Canada's future is pinned to the fate of the United Nations, a liberal international order, and a benign and mostly satisfactory relationship with the United States. In the words of a well-known tourist commercial of the mid-1990s, Canadians have bathed themselves in the belief that "the world needs more Canada." We seem to have convinced ourselves that we are a "land of tranquility, safety and whales coming up for air in slow motion" and "a place to go for global spiritual renewal." In truth, that was always fiction, not reality. Others have become smug because we weathered the severe economic depression better than most, albeit primarily on the back of strong demand for our commodities.

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The rest of the world, including many of our close allies, views us, if anything, as cosseted and complacent. Yes, we are a place of comparative tranquillity, but that had more to do with geography and happenstance than the way we choose to protect our interests and influence.

Unlike many other countries, Canada faces few threats, existential or otherwise. We remain comfortable and protected within a North American cocoon. But even that may be less certain in our future than it was in our past.

During the Cold War, the Americans had no choice but to look after our security interests because we were their front door to a potential Soviet bomber and missile attack across the North Pole. In the Trudeau era, we could avoid paying our full dues in NATO to defend western Europe because we knew that others would fill the gap. However, that didn't always stop some of our leaders from lecturing our allies, including the Americans. Pretensions of moral superiority rang hollow in the absence of tangible commitments.

Any serious analysis of Canada's international relations and role in the world must first grapple with the ways the world is changing before offering foreign policy prescriptions or a new vision of Canada's interests.

A successful foreign policy cannot be based on a one-dimensional view of the world. The problem with some of the recent studies on Canada's foreign policy and our place in the world is that they look backwards to the Cold War and the halcyon days of Pearsonian internationalism, rather than looking forwards. A successful foreign policy cannot be crafted by looking at the world from a rear-view mirror. We must grapple with the world as it is today, and how we suspect it will change in the coming years, not chart our future according to the past.

However, one of the difficulties in describing our contemporary changing world is that we confront the dilemma humorously identified in John Godfrey Saxe's poem "Six Blind Men and the Elephant," based on an Indian legend. Some feel the trunk and say the elephant is a snake, some feel a leg and say it is a tree, others feel a tusk and say it is a spear. As Saxe concluded his poem, "And so these men of Indostan / Disputed loud and long, / Each in his own opinion, Exceeding stiff and strong, / Though each was partly in the right, / And all were in the wrong!" Unlike Saxe's elephant, which may have been hard to see but was nonetheless an elephant, the contours of our current world are not only hard to see, they are also mutable, and there may well be more than one elephant in the room.

Any reset of Canadian foreign policy must begin with a careful examination of relations with the United States, which is still the biggest elephant in the room. The US has huge domestic challenges of its own. Sluggish economic growth and political gridlock in Washington on necessary fiscal reforms are sapping much of

Americans' confidence and optimism. The inconclusive outcome of western intervention in Afghanistan haunts any future outlook as does the debacle of a different sort in Iraq, one with similar civil war fallout. Both exemplify flaws in leadership, primarily, but not exclusively, by an unusually inept US administration (the utterly dysfunctional House of Representatives deserves some blame as well). Afghanistan is unravelling because the US has been unwilling to confront the real source of instability in the region—Pakistan. Having successfully ejected the Taliban from Kabul in 2002, the US and its allies then played an inconsistent game of containment and counter-insurgency but one that stopped short of eradicating the threat from within Pakistan, presumably for broader strategic reasons. The US hesitated, too, on a broadly-gauged diplomatic solution, relying instead almost exclusively and somewhat erratically on military means to restore stability. Military engagement was hampered by alliance caveats of one form or another and ultimately by withdrawal timetables determined in advance because of US electoral campaign demands. An increasingly corrupt Karzai regime only aggravated matters.

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As the provocative title of Richard Haass's (president of the US Council on Foreign Relations) recent book, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*, suggests, the US must reduce not just runaway fiscal deficits, but also its mounting piles of public debt. As demonstrated by mandatory sequestration cuts, most of which remain in place, the US's ability to fund its formidable military machine will be diminished. What resources are available will almost surely be directed at strengthening the Pacific "pivot" against China. There is little support in the US on all sides of the partisan divide post-Afghanistan and Iraq for nation-building exercises and democracy promotion in other parts of the world. The Middle East has become a muddle, with potentially explosive tendencies from Egypt to Syria, Iraq, Israel and Iran. Meanwhile, the nuclear aspirations of rogue states like North Korea and Iran continue unabated and unconstrained by any real threat from the US or the international community.

Canada is not immune from the implications of the lone superpower functioning on global issues with diminished credibility. The value of being an ally and neighbour of the US loses its currency when domestic political priorities and constraints overwhelm other considerations. Geography is the inescapable reality of our destiny and relations with the US will persist as a priority without equal. Our partnership has enormous advantages for Canada, notably in the economic sector and in terms of our security. But these ties also give us a comfort zone that breeds complacency. Besides, when North America is looked at by others, except possibly for resources, Canada is inevitably a distant second, an afterthought. This imbalance of power and attention is not likely to change any time soon. Any reset of Canadian foreign policy must begin with a careful examination of the elephant we know, the one right next door. After years of essentially running in idle, our relationship with the US merits recalibration.

Canada should consider a Third Option with Legs strategy, one that would enable us to move beyond excessive reliance on the US market and concluding trade and investment agreements with Europe and key players in Asia and Latin America to complement, balance, and simultaneously strengthen our capacity to manage relations with the US. Canada should use its comparative advantages assertively (and demand some degree of reciprocity from others) to safeguard and enhance our national interests.

More generally, Canada should assume and assert a role in world affairs commensurate with our capabilities and our potential by being selective and opportunistic. Canadians want their country to do constructive things in the world. We clearly have the capacity and inclination. What is needed now is the political will to deliver.

It is not a question of the world needing "more Canada." It is a matter of "more from Canada to the world." The key to a more mature global outlook for Canada is recognizing our limitations as a country of 35 million in a world of more than 6 billion people. We should not aspire to be all things to all people. Rather, we should muster and focus everything we've got: our economic strengths and our diplomatic skills into avenues where there are real prospects for influence and success in a world that cries out for us to be bold and brave. **P**

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