

# CANADIAN VALUES AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: WHO DECIDES?

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*Whatever the official Ottawa line may have been during the heyday of the “soft power” doctrine in the 1990s, the purpose of Canadian national security policy should not be to project Canadian values. Quite apart from the complication that Canadians probably could never agree on which values they would like to see projected, the proper purpose of policy should be to secure Canadian interests. As formally enunciated by various governments over the years, these interests have shown surprising constancy. Their restatement for the 21st century would be much closer to Louis St. Laurent’s version of them than to Lloyd Axworthy’s.*

*Quelle qu’ait été la position officielle d’Ottawa pendant les beaux jours de la doctrine du « pouvoir en douce » des années 1990, notre politique de sécurité nationale ne devrait pas viser la protection des valeurs du pays – valeurs sur lesquelles nos concitoyens seraient bien en peine de dégager un consensus –, mais bien la préservation des intérêts du Canada. Tels que les ont formellement énoncés plusieurs gouvernements au cours des années, ces intérêts se sont révélés au fil du temps d’une étonnante constance. Si on devait les reformuler pour le XXIe siècle, on en obtiendrait une version plus proche d’un Louis Saint-Laurent que d’un Lloyd Axworthy.*

*We’re there to tell Canadians what’s important.*

Peter Mansbridge, CBC commercial

Contemporary analysts of Canadian national security policy generally fall into two camps: those fighting a rearguard action to protect the reputations of anyone involved in Lloyd Axworthy’s dubious “human security” and “soft power” policies, and those who dissented from the implementation of such constructs. One argument made by those pushing “soft power” is that Canadian involvement reflects Canadian “values” and that this should be the primary motivator for international involvement, particularly when it deals with the projection of Canadian military power into regions like sub-Saharan Africa. These proponents suggest that Canada is merely “projecting Canadian values,” yet they do not clearly define what these values are, nor do they adequately demonstrate that their conception of Canadian values is, in fact, valid. Canadian values are simply assumed.

What role *should* “Canadian values” play in the formulation and execution of Canadian national security policy? The crisis we face after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 presents

us with a new vantage point on such matters, a vantage point critical to the debate over continued and even expanded Canadian military involvement in the Middle East and Central Asia.

According to the American economists David Landis and Michael E. Porter, values, attitudes and beliefs are “collectively referred to as culture” and play a role in guiding a nation economically and socially. Mariano Grondona, an Argentinean professor of government, argues that “the function of values [is] to serve as a bridge between short-term and long-term expectations, decisively reinforcing distant goals in their otherwise hopeless struggle against instant gratification.” Grondona suggests that there are two types of values: intrinsic (“those we uphold regardless of the benefits or costs”) and instrumental (“ones we support because it directly benefits us”). In the 1990s, the Axworthy foreign policy team viewed the world through the intrinsic values lens to the detriment of Canadian instrumental values.

The apparent lack of balance between the two kinds of values in the execution of Canadian national security policy has its roots in the larger problems of what constitutes

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Canadian culture. The primary problem in defining Canadian culture is its inherent, defensive anti-Americanism. As Mordecai Richler once put it, our national insecurity was so great that it “required outsiders to confirm that Canada exists.” Canada is flooded with American pop culture and business investment and is in danger of becoming submerged, or so the argument goes, therefore we must emphasize the differences between the two cultures in order to retain our autonomy. We all applaud the “I am Joe and I am Canadian” commercial; we laugh derisively at the “talking to Americans” antics of Rick Mercer; we observe the exaggerated contrasting of police techniques in “Due South” and we adopt a tone of smug moral superiority every time the United States flexes its muscles. We associate individualism, rampant religious fundamentalism and crass economic exploitation with American “values” and, since as Canadians we supposedly don’t do these sorts of things, we remain secure in our insecurity.

There is a danger, however, in defining Canadian values and culture as “not American.” The quest to be “not American” creates difficulties when Canadian interests and values coincide with American ones. When in the 1990s Canadian national security policy became based in part on projecting Canadian values overseas—Canadian intrinsic values, that is, versus American instrumental values—we fell into a logical trap. We didn’t want to be seen to behaving like ideologically proselytizing Americans, but we wanted to indulge in “do good-ism” in areas of the world beset by conflict or natural disasters. The rest of the world, however, is not like Canada, particularly those areas—Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa—to which we deployed military forces in the past decade. People in these regions often do not understand, let alone respect, Canadian values, however we choose to define them, and they generally do not play by our rules. Those who thought we could lead by example or force others to do so were simply arrogant. The trap here was that in their rush in the 1990s to improve these regions by imposing our “values,” the proponents of “soft power” adopted an almost American messianic fervor. We thought we could lead “coalitions of the willing” into Zaire in 1996. We thought we could control Tutsi-Hutu animosity. They ultimately want what we want, right? Wrong.

Let’s face reality: our post-colonial insecurities over the American cultural juggernaut turn us into patsies for anyone who will tell us how

nice we are and how different from Americans. Our pathetic desire to be thought well of has eroded Canada’s hard-won reputation for military competence. The over emphasis on a “peace-keeping” culture has led to situations in which the threat of Canadian military force is not taken seriously. This can put Canadian soldiers—our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters—into unacceptably risky situations. The mock execution incident in Bosnia in 1994 is an example.

**H**ow did we get to this point? Who gets to determine what Canadian values are? Are there in fact immutable Canadian values that can function as Grondona’s bridge between the short and long term?

Some insight into our values is provided by market researcher Michael Adams’ best-selling books *Sex in the Snow* and *Better Happy than Rich*. Adams argues that there are some 13 “values tribes” in Canada. By pigeon-holing Canadians in a variety of ways, the polling system used in *Better Happy than Rich* conveniently determines that there are three dimensions of social change (and thus values): conformity vs. individuality; other-directedness vs. inner-directedness; and asceticism/morality vs. hedonism.

According to Adams, the values of the baby-boom generation that led Canada in the 1990s included: aversion to complexity in life; confidence in advertising; hyper-rationality; financial concern regarding the future; introspection and empathy; the need for status recognition; importance of national superiority; concern for appearance. This generation of leaders tended to follow the conformity/other-directedness/morality track. Wendy Kaminer’s hilarious book *Sleeping with Extra-Terrestrials* notes that the generation currently in power is beguiled with a culture of public expiationism, a “politics of atonement” which supplanted the triumphalism of the Second World War generation. In this schema, the West is sinful because of the legacy of exploitative colonialism and neo-colonialism: *Mea culpas* in the form of massive humanitarian operations are therefore the order of the day.

The boomers are but one generation, however. If we examine Adam’s view of the follow-on generation, we see a different set of values: a penchant for risk-taking; acceptance of violence; enthusiasm for consumption; importance of national superiority; civil disobedience; need for personal achievement. Those pushing values projection as part of Canadian security policy clearly do not adhere to the second group’s values.

What about the role of the media? Few Canadian analysts treat the media seriously as a factor in the construction and implementation of Canadian national security policy. Media backlash against those who dare criticize it denies them access to the population at large. Documentaries critical of our national security policy during the Axworthy era have seldom been aired on the CBC or even on CTV.

The arrogance of the quote from Peter Mansbridge at that head of this article is indicative of the problems of values transmission through the media. In the main, government decision-makers are more concerned about what various pundits think and say publicly about their policies than whether the policies are in fact good for Canada in the long term. This is not a new problem: in 1963 the Diefenbaker government believed the public was against the acquisition of nuclear weapons and formed its policies based on this belief. It turned out that, despite the views of a vocal academic minority with access to the media, over 60 per cent of Canadians wanted nuclear weapons, while another 17 per cent were undecided. A similar analysis on the impact of polls on Canadian involvement in the 1990-91 Gulf War arrived at a similar conclusion: the Mulroney government believed there was significant opposition to Canadian involvement, yet the polling data indicated that the majority backed significant and effective military involvement. In the fall of 2001, 71 per cent of Canadians favour increasing funding to the armed forces and believe we should stand beside our allies overseas in the current crisis, even to the point of sending military forces. Yet a viewer of CBC's *Counterspin* in the days immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks might be forgiven for thinking that Canadians were either neutral or in fact supported the terrorists.

The media does not necessarily reflect what the Canadian population values; nor does it necessarily have long-term Canadian interests at heart. The remarkable conformity amongst Canadian media outlets ensures that minority or unpopular views are not permitted broad exposure. Should a *Maclean's* magazine annual poll determine our values (see, for example, the January 1, 2001 edition "We Are Canadian")? Or should the talking heads on TV Ontario, or those on CBC *Newsworld*? The television media's outright exclusionism should be exposed for what it is. As Wendy Kaminer quite correctly points out, "Anyone committed to social reform should struggle to protect the rights of dissenters, people

who challenge, even mock conventional wisdoms, people who make intentionally provocative remarks and advocate policies that deeply offend and anger the majority." This applies to people committed to international policy reform too. The media exists primarily to make money, not to propagate Canadian "values." We should not be so beguiled.

Those advocating the projection of Canadian values indulge in similar selectivity. Any culture has negative as well as positive aspects and if "values" are a reflection of what a given culture deems valuable, we must confront the reality that not everything about Canadian culture is positive. Opening that can of worms is dangerous since, as Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer points out, "one of the reasons for the aversion to confronting culture is that it touches the highly sensitive nerves of national, ethnic, and personal self-esteem by communicating the idea that some cultures are better than others, at least in the sense that they do more to promote human well-being."

Too often, "Canadian values" are a construct based on wishful thinking, not on a rational discussion of who Canadians are and what they want. As Wade Rowland suggests in his book *Occam's Razor*,

*The mistake... is in thinking and acting as though all values are equally weighty and equally important. If all values are the same, than choosing among them becomes just a matter of taste, or fashion. They are not values any more, they are preferences. But the very idea of values implies a prioritizing, in which some goals are more worthy than others, And that, naturally, implies some ultimate value or other, because if you have a hierarchy, something has to be on top. Assigning equal importance to all values simply means making them all equally unimportant.*

In the end, we are unlikely to agree on what constitutes Canadian values. Our country is too diverse for such a project. And there will always be dissenters from the mainstream. There is something fundamental that Canadians can agree on, however: the immutable Canadian interests that affect us all.

What are Canadian interests? Canada is a nation, not the ethnic archipelago described by those who predict our imminent break-up. It has three basic interests: economic prosperity for all Canadians; the physical protec-

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tion of that economic prosperity, both at home and abroad; and the physical security of Canadian citizens at home and abroad. Only Marxian utopians or anti-G8 anarchists would likely disagree with these interests. We can obviously argue about how best to achieve our national aims but the fact remains: we have interests based on instrumental values.

In today's world, isolationism is not an option. Globalization, as Thomas Friedman defines it in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, "involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states, and technologies to a degree never witnessed before." There are no friends or enemies: "there are competitors." Does globalization make national interests obsolete? Not at all. Indeed, the world Canada and its policy-makers confronted after 1945 but before the advent of the hydrogen bomb and the means to deliver it (1954-55) more closely resembled the 1990s than it did other periods of the Cold War. The late 1940s were a time of ethnic cleansing, the destruction of an old world economic order, and the increased presence of information technology and weapons of mass destruction. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Canadian interests described by the St. Laurent government in 1948 are still valid and could serve as a basis for Canadian interests far into the 21st century. As stated at that time, they include national unity, political liberty, the rule of law in international affairs, the values of Christian civilization and Canada's acceptance of her responsibility to play her part internationally. (It can be debated, of course, whether Canada remains a Christian nation.)

In the 1960s, this statement of Canadian interests was confirmed by the Pearson government, though with slightly different wording. Canada must, that government proclaimed: have military security, have expanding economic strength, maintain national unity at home be able to exert influence on others and be willing to play a creative role in international affairs.

Note that these interests were defined by elected officials, almost all of whom had some form of military experience, in consultation with educated, non-partisan members of the unelected bureaucracy. There is no historical evidence that pressure groups, television, foreign policy critics or other pundits had any significant impact on the formulation of these interests. When they were presented to the public, there was no serious debate on them. Governments did, however, rise and fall on how well they

adhered to protecting Canadian interests, particularly the governments of John Diefenbaker and Pierre Trudeau.

Too many observers dismiss any discussion of interests as nostalgia for the Cold War. This slight betrays a simplistic understanding of Canadian history. Again, as Rowland notes:

*We have tended more and more to equate the past with "bad" or "backward" and the future with "good" or "progressive," which is the distinguishing characteristic of a culture deeply devoted to progress. History [apparently] has nothing to teach us; we live on an inclined plane. Living on an upward slope is exhausting enough; living on an upward slope with no crest in sight can lead to serious psychosis.*

In the 1990s, "soft power" aficionados chose not to base their view of Canada's interests on the principles enunciated in 1948 but instead adopted something similar to the early Trudeau Government's "policy themes" and then mixed them with post-Cold War peace dividend triumphalism and post-colonial guilt-complex victimology. Canada's interests were to foster economic growth, to safeguard sovereignty and independence, to work for peace and security, to promote social justice, to enhance the quality of life and to ensure a harmonious natural environment.

On the whole, there is a semblance of philosophic harmony about these themes, but they were too far divorced from the political and economic realities of the 1970s and were not really adaptable to the 1990s. Quite apart from that, acceptance of these themes meant that there should have been a military force structure capable of carrying them out, along with the will to do so. Neither condition was achieved during the 1990s. Canada cannot do these things without an effective military force structure. To wish away or place a damper on the military role in carrying out national security policy aims is nothing short of folly. As Henry Kissinger points out in *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?* "The success of any foreign policy doctrine depends on its relevance to the historical context in which it must be implemented." Soft power did not fit within the context, Canadian or otherwise, of the vicious events of the 1990s.

Canada's reputation overseas, particularly in Western Europe, is not based on CIDA handouts or our being "kinder, gentler" Americans. It is based on nearly 100 years of military strength: the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War deployments, particularly Canada's 42-year

engagement with military forces and civilian dependents drawn from a cross-section of Canadian society and deployed in NATO's Central Region in West Germany.

Who are the people most likely to comment that we are different from Americans? Europeans. But their impression of us is not based on seeing multitudes of young Canadian backpackers wearing the maple leaf flag as they wander the continent searching for themselves. The Dutch remember Canada for our use of military force to liberate them from totalitarianism. The Italians remember us from Ortona and the long fight from Sicily to northern Italy. The Germans remember us from Ypres, Vimy, Amiens, Dieppe, Normandy and the Scheldt. They also recall our military prowess on every major NATO exercise held on German soil between 1951 and 1993, not to mention our willingness to take the lead in equipping ourselves with nuclear-capable forces to deter Soviet attack. The Norwegians and Danes recall numerous ACE Mobile Force deployments involving Canadian troops to the northern flank to demonstrate NATO resolve.

In the Balkans, the Croats certainly remember us for our willingness to use force against them in the Medak Pocket operation in 1993. (Canadian flags on backpacks are discouraged). Knowing we were quite willing to employ Leopard tanks, Coyote armoured cars, air-mobile infantry and special operations forces against them, the UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army) in Kosovo hesitated before attempting mischief in the Canadian area of operations. Similarly, belligerent forces in eastern Bosnia know that Canadian artillery will be used to bombard their weapon storage sites if they attempt to seize them.

Our experience in the Third World is rather different, unfortunately. Most contact with Canadians has been through peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. The peoples and nations of these regions like us because we're naïve, we give them what they want and we can be manipulated because we're "nice." Somalia in 1992, Rwanda in 1994 and Zaire in 1996 are examples of our blundering affability. Our lack of a sophisticated understanding of these politically complex environments, combined with our blind faith in Canadian "values"—and thus our unwillingness to deploy properly equipped military forces and our insistence on fettering those we do send with overly-legalistic rules of engagement—made us susceptible to humiliating manipulation by local players pursuing their own national aims, not ours.

We have to be crafty about how Canada engages the world. Doing so requires very particular tools and attitudes. We must discard the idea that vaguely defined Canadian values should drive Canadian national security policy. In any case, judging by the polls, the next generation will not be so easily beguiled by idealism.

How should we protect our interests? We must conduct operations in pursuit of "forward security" to keep violence away from North America and contain it overseas when it affects Canadian interests. This is done through coalition operations with our allies, within either NATO or the UN. We also need to retain the capability of unilateral interventions such as non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs) and presence missions. Humanitarian assistance operations should be the realm of NGOs, supported perhaps with Canadian aid money acquired through private donations. Our military force structure should not be geared to handle jobs that are more properly and more efficiently done by NGOs.

Most importantly, we should agree on the following principles of Canadian interest protection and then adhere to them:

- Deter: we have to demonstrate we are capable of deploying effective and relevant military forces.
- Signal: we have to send clear signals to both friends and potential adversaries.
- Execute: we have to have the will to act.
- Possess integrity: we must have the will to resist playing "optics" games. Enough of glib or half-hearted military commitments that are media-driven.

If these principles fit someone else's conception of protecting Canadian values, so much the better, but Canadian national interests must come first. Getting trapped in the values game as we did during the Stabilization Campaign of the 1990s will only distract us and waste scarce resources, particularly during these early days of the global anti-terror campaign.

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