



**Australia y Canadá: Potencias medias o hegemonías frustradas? Una visión desde México**  
 (Australia and Canada: Middle Powers or Frustrated Hegemonies? A View from Mexico)  
 María Cristina Rosas  
 Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México  
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#### THE TRIBULATIONS OF MIDDLE POWERS

The great powers have stolen the spotlight in historic events, trends, fashions, conflicts, ideology, news and, notably, internationalist study. They are only rivaled in frequency of appearance by the other extreme of the spectrum: the least advanced nations (although they seem to have disappeared from the front pages lately, except in reports about disasters or in yellow journalism where they almost always appear as central characters).

Apparently, not belonging to one group or the other has caused problems for some countries' importance and definition of what should be done. It is commonplace to talk about the end of the Cold War and the power blocs, as well as the disappearance of the superpowers, leaving a single, solitary superpower as the analytical context of the disappearance of orthodox concepts. In this new moment,

the so-called "middle powers" are beginning to occupy a special place in political studies.

For this and other reasons that will be explained, María Cristina Rosas' book is particularly propitious for students of international relations in our time. She presents a broad, encyclopedic work that will be of great help in explaining the characteristics that should be taken into account in categorizing a participant in international society as a middle power.

From the outset, the book states that this concept is very ambiguous and does not have a single meaning. Rosas brings together several definitions and tables of comparison of different countries that have at one time or another been categorized as such. The conclusion of her analysis is that "neither are all the middle powers here, nor are all those here middle powers." No country in this category is really comparable to another in each and every aspect that makes up the definition; and at the same time, there are other countries that, despite having several of the characteristics of a middle power, do not fall into that category.

Rosas and the magnificent prologue by Kim Richard Nossal, professor and director of the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University of Kingston, Ontario, show us that, beyond academic classifications, each country can be considered a middle power from the standpoint of its own experience.

This is the case of the two countries central to this study: Australia and Canada, about which there is a consensus among scholars of middle powers.

To be able to determine if they are, Rosas writes monographic chapters about both countries, explaining their history, national characteristics, similarities in terms of UN human development indicators (both have taken first place in the UN's honor roll), domestic politics, their relationship to the British Commonwealth, the influence of Great Britain and other European countries in the make-up of their economic, political and social system, their relations with the superpower and the trade and political relations between the two.

The comparative study shows a series of coincidences between the two countries, such as the lack of a cultural identity of their own, and an important number of crucial differences, among which is the most obvious, their geographical position and its influence on foreign policy: Australia's activity in the international concert is marked by the so-called "tyranny of distance," Canada's suffers from the "tyranny of proximity."

In both cases, as a product of a series of momentary and geopolitical decisions, both countries “opted for internationalism as the leitmotif” of their international relations.

Nossal explains that “internationalism is a voluntarist form of diplomacy.” His prologue offers several elements to substantiate this and to break with some myths about the two countries’ foreign policies and that of others who act similarly.

Most of the similarities between Australia and Canada in matters of foreign policy are to be found in their principles, objectives, aims and priorities. A series of their goals coincide, such as the promotion of international peace and security, underlining their preference for acting multilaterally; international cooperation for development, science and technology; and the promotion of human rights and “just causes” in the world.

This has all contributed to the widespread belief that these countries are bastions and champions of egalitarian, philanthropic and disinterested diplomacy. It is not by chance that they are considered members of the select club of the world’s boy scouts. And nothing is further from the truth.

As Nossal reminds us, “Internationalist diplomacy is profoundly self-interested.” The promotion of internationalism, like all foreign policies, is carried out in pursuit of clear national interests that are by no means altruistic.

It is in Australia’s interest “to be a friend to all the great and powerful” for reasons of security; and it is in Canada’s interest to define itself as “a friend to all” for similar reasons. It is in the interest of both to keep their bilateral relations with the mother country and the new alliance with the superpower out of sight internationally, covering over those strong links with different activities in multilateral fora.

The other myth about internationalist diplomacy is geographic determinism. Many think that both Canada and Australia, like the Nordic countries and Mexico, had no other choice but to promote certain interests in multilateral bodies given their advantageous-disadvantageous geopolitical position vis-à-vis the powers and the main actors in international relations.

While geopolitical position is worth taking into account before initiating any foreign policy, making an objective and speculative analysis of what the real impact in international events will be if you act one way or another could lead you to conclude that internationalism is optional.

This is the main characteristic of a middle power: it pursues its national interest through internationalist activist policies because it has decided to do so, but if it does not

act, life goes on, given that the actors who decide to conduct themselves in this way on the international scene are not the determining factor for changing it.

Thus, we can understand the zigzags in Canadian and Australian foreign policy in the twentieth century, moving from the “niche,” isolation and the “soft power” to raging activism in multilateral bodies on a multiplicity of issues that vary according to the situation of their economic and political relations with the great powers.

The book makes constant reference to Mexico and looks at Canada and Australia from the perspective of a Mexican specialist. The study contributes important lessons for a country like ours with its unmistakable internationalist vocation. Among those lessons are:

- The ability to influence the international scene does not come by chance. It is a choice.
- International prestige can be won if it is worked for.
- Prestige and being a leader of opinion is of great use as moral authority in defining bilateral and multilateral alliances.
- No geopolitical position is an inevitability. It is only a factor that can be used or an opportunity missed.
- Internationalist action requires a bold effort to commit yourself to the higher values of international society, both at home and abroad. If you have that determination, you can get to a point at which a middle power “graduates” and can become a great power.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the author presents the reader with an excellent description of Mexico’s relations with Australia and Canada, characterized by a lack of interest on the part of all those involved, and the relative lack of knowledge of both countries about Mexico and of Mexico about them.

In a globalized world, disinformation has become the worst sin of omission. For that reason, María Cristina Rosas’ study is an opportunity to understand a little more about the kind of relations we have with two countries important to the international concert. What is more, it sheds light on the kind of relations we could have and the windows of opportunity that the alliance with these countries could represent.

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