

# Canada's foreign policy in the '90s

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## The Conservative administrations: Normative approach and rapprochement with the United States

Canada entered the 1990s under a Progressive Conservative Party government. The Conservative administrations led by prime ministers John Diefenbaker (1957-63) and Joe Clark (1979-80) had been distinguished by their audacious approaches to foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> The administrations of Brian Mulroney (1984-88 and 1988-June 1993) and Kim Campbell (June-October 1993) were not exceptions to this trend.

Many of Canada's recent international actions can be interpreted according to the logic of reiteration of the nation's traditional commitment to multilateral institutions (the UN, NATO, OAS, etc.). Canada's traditional contribution to multinational peace-keeping forces<sup>2</sup> has been a constant. In the early '90s Canada sent more than 4,500 soldiers and police agents<sup>3</sup> to participate in multinational contingents. While such participation has diminished recent-

ly, Canada's current contribution to these forces is still 2,892 strong.<sup>4</sup> The nation also played an active role in the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and promoted the dynamic expansion of the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) organization.

In January 1990 it joined the OAS as a member with full rights. This decision, which had been delayed for 42 years, has been interpreted as an adaptation of traditional Canadian multilateral strategies to new realities. With the decline of Europe as an ally for diversification strategies, Canada is looking towards Asia and Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

Under the two Mulroney administrations, Canada's foreign policy gradually made an important turn: promotion of human rights on a world scale became a priority for the first time. In 1990 Parliament created the International Center for the Rights of the Person and Democratic Development; Edward Broadbent, former leader of the social-democratic New Democratic Party, was appointed as the center's director. Thenceforth Canada conditioned its international development aid on recipient countries' respect for human rights.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in the early '90s human rights acquired a prominent place in Canada's international program.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Cox, "Leadership Change and Innovation in Canadian Foreign Policy: The 1979 Progressive Conservative Government," in *International Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 4, Autumn 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Let us recall that the so-called "blue helmets" were created by the UN in 1956 on Canada's initiative. Since that time, Canada has participated in virtually all multinational peace-keeping missions. From 1947 to 1992, 87,000 Canadian soldiers participated in 35 missions, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs. *Le Bulletin du désarmement*, No. 20, Spring 1993, pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> The latter are members of the Royal Gendarmerie of Canada, commonly known as the "Mounted Police" or "Mounties."

<sup>4</sup> *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, March 31, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Peter McKenna, "Canada Joins the OAS: Anatomy of a Decision," in Jacques Zylberberg and François Demers (eds.), *L'Amérique et les Amériques*, Saine-Foy, Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1992, p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Cranford Pratt (dir.), *Canadian International Development Assistance Policies: An Appraisal*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, pp. 123-155.



Photos: Canadian Embassy



Jean Chrétien, Prime Minister of Canada.

The occasion for this development in foreign policy doctrine was provided by the Francophonie and Commonwealth gatherings, held in 1991 in Kinshasa and Harare respectively. In December of the same year, then-chancellor Barbara McDougall<sup>7</sup> set forth the country's international priorities, in order of importance:

1. promotion and protection of basic human rights;
2. development of democratic values and institutions;

<sup>7</sup> While Joe Clark is considered the architect of "Tory" (Conservative) foreign policy, it was Barbara McDougall who most fully carried through a foreign policy linked to the defense of human rights.

3. establishment of responsible governments throughout the world;
4. elimination of barriers to international trade, in order to develop world prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on values gave Canada's foreign policy a "normative" stamp which was so marked that it placed the defense of these values above the sovereignty of states. In McDougall's words:

"We have to reconsider the UN's traditional definition of state sovereignty. I believe that states can no longer argue sovereignty as a license for internal repression.... Some standards are universal: human rights must be respected; democratic institutions must be safeguarded; judiciaries must be free and independent; national sovereignty should offer no comfort to repressors, and no protection to those guilty of breaches of the common moral codes enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."<sup>9</sup>

This normative definition of priorities is consistent with the resolute support Canada gave to the proposal the UN's secretary general presented to the General Assembly in June 1992. In the

document entitled "A Program for Peace,"<sup>10</sup> Secretary Boutros-Ghali advocated that the United Nations participate energetically in favor of world peace, which

<sup>8</sup> These principles were reiterated a year later in "An Address by the Honourable Barbara McDougall, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at a Seminar of the Centre Québécois des Relations Internationales, 'Peacekeeping and the Limits of Sovereignty,'" Ottawa, Department of External Affairs, December 2, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara McDougall, "Co-operative Security in the 1990s from Moscow to Sarajevo," Ottawa, Department of External Affairs, May 17, 1993 (Statement 93/36).

<sup>10</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Un programa para la paz. Diplomacia preventiva, establecimiento de la paz y mantenimiento de la paz," New York, United Nations, June 17, 1992 (Document A/47/227, s/24111), pp. 1ff.



in practice would involve four phases: preventive diplomacy, the establishment of peace, peace-keeping and the consolidation of peace after conflicts. The proposal includes the objective of preventing conflicts through international intelligence, preventive troop deployment and multilateral oversight of regions pacified by force. Canada not only agreed with this but proposed even further extension of the powers of international intervention, so as to include operations for preserving the environment, against crime and terrorism, and for peace-keeping in international waters. In the name of values which it considers absolute and universal, Canada supported the creation of a kind of multilateral international police which would pay little heed to the sovereignty of states—a principle which remains sacrosanct in international law.

Beginning in 1991, Canada sent personnel to the former Yugoslavia. In April 1992 it contributed 2,400 soldiers for the creation of the United Nations Protection Force (FORPRONU); it currently maintains a contingent of 1,500 soldiers in Bosnia and Croatia—the fourth largest in the multinational force. While the fact that FORPRONU has had little success in reestablishing peace in that region is not attributable to Canada alone, her citizens are questioning the suitability of a mission which is highly expensive, has involved considerable risks for the troops participating in it,<sup>11</sup> and, finally, has not succeeded in establishing peace.

Canada's participation in Somalia was even more controversial. Mainly, because it was the first time Canadians were involved in a peace-making mission with humanitarian objectives, with the assignment of combating belligerents and not simply overseeing a truce.<sup>12</sup> In addition, because in 1993 Canadian soldiers who were members of the multinational force tortured

and killed a Somali teenager and executed three other civilians in that country, under circumstances that remain obscure. Last year, Canadian television discovered and publicized videotapes of members of the Petawawa Paratroop Regiment who participated in the Somalia mission. These videos show the paratroopers making openly racist comments as well as submitting new recruits to degrading hazing. Canadian public opinion was shaken by this confrontation with the real values and behavior of those it had viewed as defenders of a noble, humanitarian cause. The scandal was such that the unit in question was dissolved last March.<sup>13</sup> Recently, in April 1995, the massacre of 2,000 people in a refugee camp in Rwanda raised serious doubts about the usefulness of the 5,000-strong multinational unit stationed there under the command of a Canadian officer.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that Canada remained true to its multilateralist tradition and put itself forward as a defender of human rights and democracy on a world scale, there seem to be two limits to this commitment: defense issues and trade relations. In a word, for Canada national security considerations, whether of a military or economic order, weigh more heavily in the balance than the nation's general foreign policy principles.

The first weighty exception to multilateralism made itself felt in 1991 in the strategic field, with Canada's participation in the Gulf War. Canada participated in combat positions against Iraq, even when the Security Council had not authorized military actions on the basis of Articles 42 and 43 of the San Francisco Charter.<sup>15</sup> While we should in justice recognize that Canada's representatives to the United Nations pushed for a resolution in favor of multilateral intervention, in accordance with UN rules, the

<sup>11</sup> Of the 13 Canadian soldiers who died in multinational missions in 1993 and 1994, 10 were killed in the former Yugoslavia. See Jeff Sallot, "Redrawing the Lines of Battle," in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, October 8, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> See Tom Keating and Nicholas Gammer, "The 'New Look' in Canada's Foreign Policy," in *International Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 4, Autumn 1993, pp. 734-739.

<sup>13</sup> A huge number of articles were published on this topic last year. For a summary, see Jeff Sallot, "Airborne Heads Held High at Unit's Last Parade," in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, March 2, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Winsor, "Why the UN Watched This Happen," in *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, April 28, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> These articles define the criteria for multinational military intervention in a conflict involving recalcitrant adversaries.





Canada's government palace.

fact is that Canada actively participated in a military action which, in the eyes of the international community, was led by the United States. Thus, "The Mulroney government's response to the crisis was seen by some as little more than a poor reflection of that being pursued by the Bush administration in Washington."<sup>16</sup> This perception was particularly widespread among Latin American governments, which recalled that in December 1989, a few days after announcing its intention to join the OAS, Canada supported the United States' unilateral intervention in Panama. In light of the end of the Cold War, at a time when Canada was reducing its commitments to the hegemonic military organization of which it is a member,<sup>17</sup> it was legitimate to ask if this support to dubious U.S. military initiatives really corresponded to the defense of strategic Canadian interests or was merely a product of inertia.

In the economic field, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that Canada established with the United States

in 1989 represents another significant nuance to Canada's multilateralist policy.<sup>18</sup> Interpretations of this decision's meaning in terms of foreign policy are not unanimous. For some analysts it represents a radical turn in the way Canada relates to the world;<sup>19</sup> others saw it as merely a tactical adaptation in light of the uncertainty of the world commercial order.<sup>20</sup>

In any case, the decision was a critical one, not only for the government but for the Canadian people. The long process of negotiating this accord—from 1985 through its ratification in late 1988—allowed the political debate to develop and pro and con positions to become polarized. In power since 1984, the Tories were,

in fact, reelected in November 1988 after a race in which the FTA was the central issue. The Conservative victory was interpreted as consent by the majority of Canadian citizens towards this controversial accord.

On the other hand, Canada participates in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) more as a defensive measure than on its own initiative. In fact, the announcement of the beginning of negotiations between Mexico and the United States in 1990 took Canadians by surprise. After several

<sup>18</sup> In Canada, foreign policy and international trade policy, while managed at the operational level by different groups, are coordinated by a single central agency: the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Thus, in principle there is interdependence and coherence between both policies.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Gordon Mace and Jean-Philippe Thérien draw the conclusion that the Free Trade Agreement represents "...the most important shift in all of Canada's foreign policy behaviour during the twentieth century." See their "Canada in the Americas: The Impact of Regionalism on a New Foreign Policy," paper presented to the annual congress of the Association for International Studies, Acapulco, 23-27 March, 1993, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Tom Keating maintains: "The slow progress of multilateral trade negotiation was another reason why the government opted first for the bilateral route." See *Canada and World Order...*, p. 242. This interpretation is in line with the government's justification.

<sup>16</sup> Keating, *Canada and World Order...*, p. 231.

<sup>17</sup> In 1992 Canada began withdrawing its troops stationed in Europe as part of NATO's central front; this included the closing of bases on German territory (Lahr and Baden-Soellingen).



months in which it did not take a clear stance, the Conservative government decided to ask to participate in the North American accord in order to prevent the United States from becoming the privileged center of economic exchanges in North America. Above and beyond its origin, there is no doubt that Canada's participation gave reality to the idea of North America as a geographical entity whose community of interests goes well beyond economic matters.

### The Liberal government, or pragmatism as a norm of conduct

The Conservative Party was dramatically thrown out of power in the October 1993 elections. Citizens' votes gave the top hand to Canada's other major party, the Liberal Party, which has governed the country during the greater part of this century. Its leader, Jean Chrétien, became the new prime minister in November of that year.<sup>21</sup> The new government's foreign policy would be dictated by domestic needs. The Liberals' winning electoral platform centered on a priority objective: job creation.<sup>22</sup> The Liberal government was also preoccupied with reducing the government's deficit and the public debt. In short, pressing economic issues took precedence over the nation's international policy.<sup>23</sup>

On February 7, 1995, in response to recommendations from the special mixed parliamentary committee charged with reviewing foreign policy, the Liberal government set forth its foreign policy in a document entitled "Canada in the World."<sup>24</sup> In this doc-

ument the Liberals define three priorities, in order of importance:

1. Promoting economic growth and jobs, ensuring Canadian products' and investments' access to world markets, and promoting world prosperity.
2. Promoting security within a peaceful world framework. Within this objective, nevertheless, there is a return to economic priorities: "Success increasingly derives from economic wealth rather than from military might."<sup>25</sup> Preventive diplomacy and peace-making are still mentioned as favoring world peace, although now as a last resort if conventional policies fail.
3. The international projection of Canadian values and culture: respect for human rights, democracy, respect for the law and protection of the environment. The reasoning is that this protection will advance Canada's interests because it will create a more stable international situation and increase the Canadian economy's competitiveness on a world scale.

One is immediately struck by the way this new policy inverts the order of priorities put forward by

<sup>25</sup> *Canada in the World*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of those elections, see Julián Castro Rea (coord.), *Elecciones en Canadá: Cambio y continuidad*, Mexico City, CISAN-UNAM, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> In 1990 Canada entered one of the deepest economic recessions in its history. During the election campaign unemployment reached a national average of 12 percent of the economically active population.

<sup>23</sup> One of the new administration's first actions was to cancel an order for British EH-101 combat helicopters, which meant a savings of 5.8 billion Canadian dollars.

<sup>24</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Canada in the World, Government Statement*, Ottawa, Canada Communication Group, 1995.



The Department of External Affairs.