

### America and the World - 2017 and Beyond

#### "Canada and the Election of Donald Trump"

Essay by David G. Haglund, Queen's University



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California and Canada have some things in common, extending far beyond the trivial fact that each political entity sports in its name the same two first letters. They are, for starters, similarly sized demographic entities, Canada's 35 million or so people nearly matching California's 39 million. They are each considered, with reason, to be multicultural, meaning basically that within their boundaries live a multitude of folk of differing ethnicities, not infrequently speaking languages other than English. They both have been regarded, again with reason, as 'outliers' from mainstream tendencies, social as well as political: California is often heralded, by friends and foes alike, as the harbinger of trends yet to unfold elsewhere in America; Canada is taken, in this age of populism marching triumphantly through one political system after another in the Western world, to be one of the remaining unambiguous bastions of 'liberal democracy.' Finally, Canada tends, in American elections, to 'vote' very much the way California does. Indeed, had Canadians possessed the right to cast a ballot in the most recent presidential election, their preference for Hillary Clinton would have been registered at least as strongly as was Californians' own preference for the Democratic candidate.

So, at first glance, it would seem that Canadians should be very troubled about the prospect of their great neighbor to the south being led by Donald J. Trump for at least the next four years. Even more worrisome from their perspective is that they do not possess the easy option that many anti-Trump Americans believe lies at their disposal: Canadians cannot move to Canada. Neither, it should be pointed out, could most of the American wannabe Canucks move northward, for Ottawa, all of its new-age talk to the contrary notwithstanding, is as firmly committed to the Westphalian order as is Washington or any other Western capital. They all take sovereignty, and therefore borders, seriously. Potential immigrants must ask for and be granted permission to enter, not simply show up at the border and expect to be invited inside (the situation is a bit different for refugees, depending on where they arrive from).

Compounding the sense of Trump-induced disquiet in Canada is the knowledge that relations with the U.S. are most unlikely to be as smooth in years ahead as they were during the two administrations of Barack Obama. It is true that there were real bilateral conflicts on a few issues during the Obama years, and that former Prime Minister Stephen Harper did not “bond” very much with his American counterpart, but since the election of Justin Trudeau in October 2015 it has become commonplace for observers to speak and write of a ‘bromance’ between the Canadian and American leaders. No one is going to use that same descriptor for the Trump-Trudeau relationship. As far as Canadians are concerned, Donald Trump has a very tough act to follow, indeed; any president, Hillary Clinton included, would have confronted a challenge in trying to match Obama’s popularity among Canadians. The real question in terms of Trump and Canada is rather a different one: is there a genuine risk of bilateral relations returning to the level of acrimony that so marked the years during which George W. Bush was in the White House? Fairly or otherwise, Canadians considered Bush to be the least admirable president since James Madison, who was in office the last time the two peoples ever went to war against each other.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the singularly unpleasant things that were said by Trump (and, to be fair, Clinton as well, though to a far lesser degree) during the long and dismal presidential campaign just ended – things that made many Canadians wonder every bit as much as many Americans about the psychological balance of the Republican candidate – there were also a few campaign promises that, if they were ever to see the light as either policy or legislation, or both, would spell trouble galore for the bilateral relationship. On the other hand, there are some indications of a Trump presidency’s actually benefitting Canadian interests. Let’s take a look at four areas of policy, starting with what, for Canadians, is most important of all, trade.

There was a time when Trump-like mercantilist rhetoric would have found a deep reservoir of supporters in Canada. *Mutatis mutandis*, there were many who were sure that to ‘make Canada great again’ required protecting its secondary manufacturing against foreign (read: American) competition. Canada’s embrace of free trade did not come easily, or naturally, and at its inception the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement of 1989 was extremely controversial. Today, it seems to represent the logic of history, as well as the apogee of political and economic virtue. Ergo, should Donald Trump carry out the promise of dismantling or radically changing NAFTA (the successor to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, CUSFTA), few in Canada would rejoice. Of course, should Trump decide to scrap NAFTA but preserve the preexisting CUSFTA, few in Canada would shed other than crocodile tears, protestations of trilateral North American ‘solidarity’ to the contrary notwithstanding. *Sauve qui peut*.

The second issue, energy, similarly holds out menace, but also promise. The promise inheres in Trump’s campaign commitment to build the Keystone XL pipeline. One might think that the Trudeau government, as rhetorically ‘green’ as they come anywhere in the world, would be opposed to Keystone. But of course, it wants the pipeline to be built. It knows both how controversial pipeline projects can be in Canada, yet how necessary they are, unless Canada is prepared to sacrifice its oil industry and a few provinces (Alberta especially) upon the altar of environmentalism. Keystone would be, in this context, a *deus ex machina* for Canada. On the other hand (there always *is* such an appendage), a Trump administration whose enthusiasm for drilling and fracking were to result in American self-sufficiency in oil, would obviously cut into Canadian market share, and thus be seen, and not only for environmental reasons, as a challenge to Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Adams, “Bash Thy Neighbour,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 19 October 2005, p. A21.

The third issue is the border. Although there was a time, during the Vietnam-era heyday of English-Canadian anti-Americanism, when ‘closing the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel’ could serve as a rallying cry for nationalists, very few in Canada, these days, think that making the border with the U.S. ‘harder’ is a wise idea. Just the reverse; they worry that security phobias born of misconceptions about the so-called terrorist threat to the U.S. from Canadian soil have led to the border’s becoming more cumbersome to cross in the period since 9/11. Recent years have seen a very high degree of cooperation between Ottawa and Washington on the counterterrorism front, and to the extent that the appearance of ‘home-grown’ jihadists in both countries has had an impact on the border, it has probably been to keep further fortress-building tendencies at bay. Among other reasons, this is because the homegrown have fostered extremely tight bonds between intelligence and counterterrorism units in the two countries. A case in point was this past summer, when an ISIS-inspired jihadist, Aaron Driver, was killed by the RCMP before he could detonate his explosive device among a crowd of civilians in southwestern Ontario, as a result of Canadian counterterrorism officials being tipped off of the impending plot by their American counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of defense policy. On the negative side of the ledger, a Trump presidency can be expected to be uncomfortable for Canada, for reasons related to alliance ties. Although Donald Trump will hardly be the first president to signal a desire for greater ‘burden sharing’ among allies – all American presidents have been doing this since the formation of NATO – he might be taken more seriously than any of his predecessors. That is because he has let it be known that NATO could well be obsolete. To the extent the allies do not pony up more than the miniscule share of GDP currently spent on defense by so many of them (including Canada, which spends almost as small a share – one percent – of its GDP on the military as does Germany), Trump could present the kind of menace that none of his predecessors had, for the good reason that no one really took their burden-sharing hectoring too much to heart, since the predecessors were all regarded (correctly) as being very pro-NATO. No one thinks similarly about Donald Trump, though he likely will end up conforming to his predecessors’ pattern. On the plus side, should a Trump presidency eschew the kind of interventionist militancy that so soured the Canadian mood toward George W. Bush, then a President Trump who acts more like Rand Paul than Paul Wolfowitz could be expected to be a refreshing change for a war-averse public – the two Pauls in question representing, respectively, the anti-interventionist Senator from Kentucky and the very interventionist deputy secretary of defense at the time of the 2003 Iraq War.

I conclude this brief essay where I began it, with reference to California. It behooves us to reflect upon how the Canadian public responded, 36 years ago, to the election of the third (and last) Californian to the presidency, Ronald Reagan. Similar to the mood today, there was in Canada then an expectation that relations were going to be getting much worse between the two neighbors, and many smart minds were turning their attention to countering what was widely advertised as the “Reagan challenge.”<sup>3</sup> In the end, things worked out better than most of the skeptics in November 1980 could possibly have imagined. The

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<sup>2</sup> Leyland Cecco, Tu Thanh Ha, and Mahnoor Yawar, “Foiled Threat Shows Limits on Controlling Aspiring Terrorists,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 August 2016, pp. A1, A4.

<sup>3</sup> For titles reflective of that era’s mood, one by a nationalist author and the other by a non-nationalist one, see respectively Stephen Clarkson, *Canada and the Reagan Challenge: Crisis and Adjustment, 1981-85* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1985), and John W. Holmes, *Life with Uncle: The Canadian-American Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

Cold War was brought to an end, and the prospect of closer North American economic integration began to look like more of a promise than a threat. There could be far worse things, from the point of view of the Canada-U.S. relationship, than for Donald Trump to turn out to be a second coming of Ronald Reagan.

**David G. Haglund** is a Professor of Political Studies at Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario, Canada). His research focuses on transatlantic security, and on Canadian and American international security policy. Among his books are *Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940* (1984), *The New Geopolitics of Minerals: Canada and International Resource Trade* (1986), and *Over Here and Over There: Canada-US Defence Cooperation in an Era of Interoperability* (2001). He has recently completed a monograph on ethnic diasporas and their impact upon security relations between the United States and Canada, entitled *Ethnic Diasporas and the Canada-US Security Community: From the Civil War to Today* (2015).

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