

Notes from a Statement

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Check Against Delivery

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Introduction

First, I will make five general observations and then elaborate on them as time permits.

1. I do not believe that there is any sense of a North Atlantic region shared vocation in the world. To answer the central question posed in the programme notes.
2. “Transatlantic Relations”, if that phrase is intended to cover US-European, government-to-government relations, are not better than fair and not likely to get better in the short term.
3. The US election is seen by the President as a vindication of his foreign policy.
4. The US election legitimized Anti-Americanism
5. There are two areas where Canada-UK cooperation could make a difference, viz., supporting UN renovation and promoting multilateral innovation, in particular, supporting UN reform and, also, L 20 cooperation

Canada, the UK and the North Atlantic Region

The central question before this colloquium is whether the states of the North Atlantic region (a dubious proposition geographically and, increasingly, politically) possess a shared vocation in the world. The answer, which only becomes clearer as time goes by, is that they do not. Or at least that Canada does not. I am struck by the irony of the photographs hanging in the hotel of Churchill, Roosevelt and Mackenzie King in 1943. The Transatlantic triangle then meant that Canada got to choose the meal menus and not much else. Even though our war effort was actually very large, (at the end of the war, there were 500,000 soldiers under Canadian command in Northern Europe—not all, but mostly, Canadians), Mackenzie King was not even in the room when Roosevelt and Churchill discussed “Operation Overlord”.

There is no reason to believe there would be a much larger executive role for Canada today. Partly because of the tug of history, partly out of a conviction that similar values ought to induce cooperation and partly to advance our national interests, Canada has made several attempts to create some sort of structured relationship with Europe

- The Third Option
- The Contractual Link
- Canada-EU free trade—(the EU was more interested in Mexico)
- Most recently, the Joint Declaration

None has transformed or even much enhanced Transatlantic Relations. We, the EU and Canada, do have much in common, in terms of values and possibly world view, e.g., our voting records at the UN have been near identical—much closer with each other than with the US. But even at the UN life with the EU has not been particularly cooperative:

- Interminable internal EU processes
- EU “dance” with the G 77, to the exclusion of others
- EU greed for elected positions

Further, it is not obvious that London, for whom the “special relationship” with Washington appears to trump all else, would be interested in real cooperation with Ottawa. Nor is it self-evident that Ottawa would see significant benefit in aligning itself with a British foreign policy that has cost the UK so much, at least reputationally, and delivered it so few returns. So there is little prospect of a new Triangular much less Quadrangular relationship.

The significance of the US election

While most Americans could likely be regarded as purple, and neither red nor blue, the majority of American voters either support the probably illegal, certainly ill-advised war in Iraq or regard it as less important than other electoral issues, including socially conservative issues such as gay marriage. A recent poll by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at University of Maryland is very interesting. The poll, released October 21, measured the foreign policy views of Bush supporters and Kerry supporters. Among its findings:

- Even after the Duelfer report, the interim Kaye report, the 9/11 Commission report; and the Senate intelligence committee report, 72% of Bush supporters continued to believe that Iraq had actual WMD (47%) or a major program for developing them(25%)
- 75% of Bush supporters continued to believe Iraq either was directly involved in 9/11 (20%) or was providing substantial support to Al Qaeda (55%)
- Large majorities of Bush and Kerry supporters believed that that was what President Bush was saying
- Other findings about Bush supporters include:
 - The majority of the world preferred Bush to Kerry
 - 82% of Bush supporters believe either that the world feels better about the US because of its foreign policy (37%) or are evenly divided (45%)
 - They also thought President Bush supported action on global warming, the landmines treaty and the nuclear test ban treaty

The pollsters put these remarkable findings down to “cognitive dissonance”, i.e., people hearing what they want to believe. The US truly has a faith-based foreign policy. In any case, the election legitimized anti-Americanism. Before the election it was possible to argue that the problem was the Bush administration not the people. Now it is clear that the American people in their majority support policies that much of the rest of the world regards as illegal, illegitimate, dangerous or dumb.

Now What?

There is little doubt that the Administration feels it is vindicated. Nor is there much doubt that we will see continuity, that is, an aggressive and active foreign policy, comparisons with Ronald Reagan notwithstanding. Washington is making overtures to countries that opposed the war but it is not clear yet what that means. Colin Powell, before he resigned, suggested that it meant that those countries would be allowed to make amends by offering troops for Iraq (Financial Times, November 9).

So is it time to move on, to accommodate to the reality of America? At one level it is. The US did what it did and it is not in anyone's interest to see Iraq become the next launching pad for anti-western extremism. But more fundamentally, unless the US effectively changes course, it will be hard in practice to do more than cooperate at the margins with the US. This Administration has undermined its own legitimacy by ignoring international law, abandoning consensual decision-making and sacrificing the US reputation for moral leadership and moderation.

The US elections results mean that there is no political check or balance left on the exercise of American military power; the only limiting factor now is intractable reality, and possibly civil disobedience if the occupation in Iraq worsens.

American exceptionalism, together with the Bush doctrine of unilateralism/idealism set out in the 2002 national security strategy, will continue to make Washington a difficult international partner. But thanks to the Iraq experience a partner with narrower choices to military overstretch and to the triple deficits the US is running.

Canada

In the wake of a US election, in which “values”—“God, guts and guns”, in its pejorative shorthand—may have determined the outcome, the challenges of living next door to the world's most powerful nation are all too comprehensible and present. Canadian governments, while respecting Canadians' principles and promoting their interests, including their safety, will find working with the US challenging.

Canada, for its part, will need to continue to carry out a two-pronged foreign policy. In North America, we will need to be a reliable partner in the defence of the homeland. This means taking every reasonable step to ensure Canada does not become a back door threat to the United States, cooperating pro-actively on coastal surveillance and defence, including container port security, “smarter” border policies such as pre-clearance and the like.

Internationally, Canada will need to conduct its foreign policy independently, neither shrinking from agreeing with the Americans when we believe them to be right nor shrinking from disagreeing when we believe them to be wrong. We should not give up on multilateral cooperation and the pursuit of the rule of law.

The US has often been an ambivalent multilateral partner but multilateral cooperation continues because there is no effective alternative to it. Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and 50 plus years of post-war cooperative international institution-building, treaty-making, norm creation, network development and economic globalization have changed forever the way the world manages international relations. The world has learned to work with the US where it can and to work around the US where it must, as it has done, for example, on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. This pragmatism is against the day that the US might decide to cooperate, either formally as it has on the Law of the Sea Treaty, or informally as it has on the Anti-Personnel Land Mines Treaty.

With American participation and leadership, multilateral cooperation will be more comprehensive. Without the US, such cooperation will be narrowed. Either way, it will continue because our increasingly integrated, interdependent world simply demands cooperative management to function.

What the UK and Canada Could Cooperate On

None of this implies satisfaction with existing international institutions, the UN above all. When the UN Charter was drafted in 1945, it was agreed that the prohibition of interference in the internal affairs of states was the key to peace. Now, in a time of failing states and proliferating weapons of mass destruction, intervention may be the new key, provided that unlike Iraq, it is done corporately and passes “the global test”, as candidate Kerry famously put it in the election debates.

To save “succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, the international community will need to qualify state sovereignty so that it can legally stop humanitarian catastrophes within countries, prevent the development and spread of weapons of mass destruction within and between countries, deny international terrorists refuge anywhere and fight organized crime.

The UN High Level Reform Panel (HLP) report on reform will shortly be out. Assuming the panel’s proposals are viable, governments that value the UN will need to sell them. This is one area where Canadian and UK interests broadly align. We could make it a respective foreign policy priority to promote the panel’s findings. One way we could do so is through an L 20. We could agree to promote a summit meeting of the “L-20”, leading developed and developing countries, which has been advocated by the Government of Canada, among others in order to promote and implement the HLP recommendations.