

**The Two Sides of the Canadian Foreign Policy Coin
and
Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, PC, CC.

The program for this timely and important conference announced that I would speak to you about Canada and the Caribbean. I assure you that I will. But before doing so I want to spend some time reflecting more broadly on some essential elements of a successful Canadian foreign policy, and then put our relations with Latin America and more particularly the Caribbean in that context.

I am conscious of the fact that I was the last of the Canadian foreign ministers whose departments had the financial resources, and the authority, to take initiatives consistently across a wide range of issues. My successors were all more constrained, so I won't waste too much time on "what we did then".

However I do want to make the point that the critical resources were not financial. They were human. There was an interest – in the collective leadership of the government – in playing an active role in the world. And there was energy – in the department, in CIDA, and in the foreign policy community generally – which gave the political leadership the ideas and the arguments to make a Canadian difference.

No one here can know whether the political leadership of this new government will be committed to an activist international role for Canada. You will understand that I am not here as the spokesperson for Mr. Harper.

But what people here can do is provide the ideas and the arguments. Officials can make the case for valuable policy initiatives, as the department did to me on many issues, including those relating to our role in our own hemisphere – the focus of this conference. I think for example of Central America and our membership in the OAS.

Of course one can find things to be gloomy about – one always can -- and the foreign policy community is pretty good at gloom. But it is even better at innovation, and I hope that is the spirit that flows from these discussions.

Based on remarks to a conference organized in Ottawa on April 21, 2006 by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs and The Canadian Foundation for the Americas. The theme of the conference was ***Where can Canada Really Make a Difference: A Critical look at neglect and opportunity in Latin America and the Caribbean.***

As I said there is a context that I want to set before commenting on Canada's interests, opportunities and indeed responsibilities in the Caribbean.

Specifically, I am going to speak about foreign policy and Canadian national purpose, and about the need to accord equal priority to working *with* the United States and *beyond* the United States.

Jean Chrétien was my immediate predecessor as Secretary of State for External Affairs. Just days after I had been sworn in, he spoke at an event we both attended.

He said: "one of the things Joe Clark and I have in common is that neither one of us knows anything about international affairs."

But what he might have said is that we both came to parliament as domestic politicians. What drew us was not international issues, but national – and, more particularly, national unity and identity. In my view, those remain the issues on which Canada will stand or fall.

One of the central challenges of a diverse and privileged country is that it is too easy to take our good fortune for granted, and thus to slide into separate parts. A diverse and lucky country like Canada has to keep proving our collective worth to all of us.

That means looking to issues and aspirations that reach across the lines that might otherwise divide Canadians, and to characteristics that distinguish us, legitimately, from comparable societies.

So among the central attributes critical to Canadian foreign policy is the generation and representation of a sense of Canadian purpose and identity. That is a fundamental national interest.

There can be no doubt about the importance of the United States to Canada.

Canada-US relations have to be a dominant priority of any Canadian government, as they appear to be the dominant international priority of the new Harper government.

But I would argue that the most urgent foreign policy priority for Canada is not our relations with the United States, important though that is, but our international role and reputation beyond the United States.

Rebuilding Canada's credentials as a distinctive and independent presence in international affairs is, among other advantages, key to our constructive influence in Washington.

When Canada has been most effective internationally it has been because we pursued two priorities at the same time. We worked hard on our friendship with the United States. And we worked hard on an independent and innovative role in the wider world.

Those are not opposite positions. They are the two sides of the Canadian coin and both must be given attention or we debase our currency

Our access to Washington adds real clout to the standing that we earn by our actions in other countries. When Canada's relations with Washington are strong, other countries come to us, or listen to us, not just because of our own merits, but because we can influence the super-power.

By the same token, our reputation in the developing world, and in the multilateral community – to name only two critical fora – have been assets that the United States cannot always command.

The Mulroney government worked closely with the United States, and achieved major breakthroughs, notably on free trade and acid rain.

At the same time, we disagreed, and disagreed sharply, on many issues:

On Cuba

On the way to fight apartheid in South Africa

On Nicaragua and the authority of the World Court

On the Palestinian right to self-determination

And on the Strategic Defence Initiative, the so-called “star wars”, in which President Reagan believed avidly, and to which Prime Minister Mulroney said: “No - the government of Canada will not take part.”

These differences did not impair our constructive and valuable relationship with the United States

Our reason for being active in the wider world was the objective importance of what Canada was doing – in Africa, in Central America, in multilateral agencies, in official development assistance. But a consequence was that we had cards to play in Washington.

This wasn't a Progressive Conservative invention. That's how the Trudeau government persuaded the economic summit to let Canada be a member. That's how Lester Pearson and General E. L. M. Burns persuaded the United Nations to launch peacekeeping. We used both sides of the Canadian coin.

This is a good time for Canada to return to our tradition of active internationalism, both to restore our own internal balance, and because diplomacy is becoming more relevant again.

The end of the cold war changed the fundamental dynamics of foreign policy in western countries. Economics replaced politics. Our interests became much more mercantile.

Now, with the thrust of terrorist attacks into the precincts and the psyche of the United States, with violence continuing in Iraq and threats rising in Iran, with HIV/AIDS spreading, we recognize again that the world is not so simple, or so safe.

For all our growth and innovation, Canada has relatively less influence in trade and economics than we have in politics and diplomacy.

Economic power reflects size; diplomacy depends more on imagination and agility, and on reputation. Canada's political strengths have more currency again, if we choose to use them, including in the United States.

No one speaks to Washington with the weight of an equal. But some few countries have had the capacity to speak with the influence of a trusted friend. Despite the recent strains, Canada has not lost that capacity. And the United States needs frankness and friends more than ever.

This is the case with respect to our hemisphere as it is elsewhere.

There are some very real opportunities in this region to reinforce both sides of Canada's foreign policy coin. Let's check off the essential elements of the situation of the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean.

First, the region is critically important to them – in economics, in immigration, in security, in political calculations and, not least, in self-esteem. Whatever the other threats of a shrinking world, there is a special sensitivity about trouble “off the American shore”, “in the American neighbourhood.”

Second, there is trouble in that neighbourhood. Some countries are in the violent eye of the storms of illegal trade in guns and drugs. Moreover the inherent tensions of US relations with many have been aggravated by the election of governments ready to take Washington on, a rebirth of scepticism about American market model, and the general erosion of US political authority after Iraq.

Third, the Americans know the situation is serious, but they are inescapably pre-occupied elsewhere. So they need help, and they know it, and some of it is help that we can provide. Because of our own keen interests in the region, and our own complex relationship with Washington, we need to step forward where we can.

Canada brings more than just proximity. Our distinctive strengths as a nation, a society, and a strong modern economy are real and substantial. Some of those political strengths are now more relevant than ever.

Managing diversity, bridging differences, setting an active example of respect are valuable assets again. We Canadians have the luxury, skill and imagination to help lead the world's response to deep tensions that, clearly, cannot be calmed by guns and dollars.

That is true generally, and it is true in our home hemisphere, the Americas and the Caribbean.

Where there are always tensions between the United States and some of its neighbours, all sides would welcome the trusted and reconciling role of Canada.

A remarkable number of our neighbours have done what we urged, and shown the courage to adopt democracy, and the imagination to embrace new trading relations and market reforms. Very recently – until about ten years ago -- Canada played an active and effective role in our home hemisphere.

We had become a full member of the Organization of American States. We helped design and implement the peace process in Central America. We met regularly with the leaders of the Caribbean. The Chrétien government hosted the highly successful Quebec Summit of the Americas.

And then our profile fell. And after 9/11, the world turned its attention elsewhere, even though the hemisphere's strategic importance, and security threats, increased.

I don't dispute the opening of new Canadian consulates in the United States. But by what logic do we simultaneously reduce our presence and our profile in the strong economies and turbulent communities of the rest of our hemisphere? If you were sitting in the US State Department or the White House, looking at the threats and opportunities in this hemisphere, would an influential Canadian presence be more helpful to you in Denver or in Caracas?

I come now more specifically to the Caribbean

It is worth recalling that, before Kandahar, before Davos, before Hawaii, before the rich students from Hong Kong and the Emirates, before the FTA, there was the Caribbean. The Caribbean has changed, as Canada has, but neighborhoods are where you come from, as well as where you live today, and we have history, and institutions, and interests in common.

In looking for ways to strengthen the relationship between Canada the Caribbean, we are not talking about creating something new or artificial. The reasons for a strong relationship are tangible and current and real – geography, security, investment, common institutions, language, and opportunity.

And our common pedigree reaches back centuries - we have had shared interests for a very long time. The economic and other connections with Atlantic Canada pre-date confederation. For much of its history, Newfoundland had more to do with the Caribbean

than it did with Canada. At a time when Canada was not much present in the world, our inter-connections with the Caribbean were significant – business, banks, students, parliaments, and vacations. We were part of one another's neighbourhood.

People in Barbados still show me the hotel where John Diefenbaker took two weeks in winter, when he needed respite from Prince Albert and his party. Lester Pearson was in the Bahamas, in a Canadian enclave, when his government lost a budget vote. (Perhaps if I had known anybody in Leyford Key in 1979, history would have been different, but I don't belong to Canada's establishment party.)

Policy cannot be built on anecdotes or nostalgia. But a strong relationship does require a coincidence of attitudes as well as interests, and our long history and shared roots influence those attitudes. The Canadian perspective on the Caribbean is broader than trade or tourism or tax shelters. The Caribbean perspective on Canada understands full well that we are a different society and partner than the United States.

Any renewed relationship must be built on interests that are real, mutual and contemporary. The relation might once have relied too heavily on high-proof rum. It might later have relied too heavily on official development assistance. But the past is past, and the focus now should be on the future.

There is a wide range of contemporary common interests – investment, security, health, education, the promotion of strong societies and vibrant and respectful democracies, the simple need for friends one can count on.

That is a partial, notional list. But if it is to be transformed into policy, any time soon, at least two steps are necessary.

The first is to identify where the common ground is now. That may require learned and expert studies, but I doubt it. It would be much more direct and effective to simply start a serious conversation, probably among a small and trusted group of Caribbean and Canadian leaders, to see where the room to build might be.

The second step would be, within that conversation, to deal honestly with some of the hard questions.

Some of those questions, from the Canadian side are:

What do we say about ODA? Development assistance is not going to play the prominent role in the future that it did in the past, so what are the contemporary ways to face development issues.

How hard do we push economic integration? When Canadian central bankers and economists prescribe tighter economic union as a condition precedent for progress in the Caribbean, they forget Canada's own history and experience as a diverse federation, whose reality would not succumb to the centralizing theories and hopes of our own

fathers of confederation. The Caribbean is, to coin a phrase, a community of communities, and its persistent and distinct identities are not going to melt away. Canadians, of all people, should understand that dynamic.