

Canada in the Americas

The Ebbs and Flows of Assuming a Significant Role¹

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Throughout the decades, Canada's relationships in the hemisphere have seen many ebbs and flows. From the initial issue of acknowledging the existence of a continent south of the United States, to its self-identification as a country of the hemisphere, to participating in regional affairs, Canada's involvement has been at best inconstant and sporadic. Periods of great commitment and effervescent participation have been followed by times of lethargic indifference. The current government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has signaled that the Americas are once again at the forefront of Canada's foreign policy. Thus the discussion that follows seems timely.

The focus of this paper is on Canada's relationship with the hemisphere as a whole. Dissociating the analysis from Canada–U.S. relations presents a challenge, and it could be argued that in many cases it is through that prism that some of Canada's actions in the hemisphere are better explained. Yet the focus here is on Canada's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, which, unless otherwise stated, are referred to as "the region."

This paper examines the history of Canada–Americas relations from the election of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's first government (1968) to the present day.¹ There have been several waves of discovery of the world to the south; as Jean Daudelin points out, "every twenty years or so, it seems, Canada rediscovers the Americas." While he points to three such occasions—in 1968, at the end of the 1980s, and in 2007 (Daudelin, 2007: 2)—what has happened in the lows that have usually followed the longer- or shorter-lived

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rediscoveries is as telling of the nature of the relationship as the grand declarations that have marked each of them.

Explaining Canada's lack of sustained commitment towards the region over time demands undertaking the following tasks. First and foremost Canada's interests, or lack thereof, in the region must be evaluated, given how this influences the levels of attention in policy design. Second, we need to identify the determinants of foreign-policy design that explain Canada's timing and choices vis-à-vis the region. Third, those determinants in specific instances of the relationships must be examined. Lastly, an analysis of the strategic choices, courses of action, and subject matters derived from the policy decisions must be undertaken.

This paper contends that defining Canadian interests in the region cannot be confined to investments and trade quantifications or security concerns alone, but demands a more comprehensive approach. The suggested approach, of a necessarily more qualitative nature when not rooted in "real" interests, has allowed in the past too much room for vagueness in identifying and defining what those other interests are. A lack of focus in policy design, and actions driven by "values-based" voluntarism, can be attributed to this lack of precision. The rationale for paying attention to the region has mostly been explained as a reaction to exogenous determinants, such as world events, the variations in Canada–U.S. relations, personal initiatives, etc. The ever-changing nature of these determinants accounts in turn for varying levels of intensity of commitment and consistency of policies vis-à-vis the region.

Whereas different instances in the Canada–Americas relationship have been interpreted as representing departures or major changes in policy direction, or, conversely, as an expression of continuity, these cannot be analyzed or understood without examining the exogenous determinants at any given time. A similar stance is posited when considering choices of implementation strategies and reviewing the pre-eminence of the multilateral

arena as a choice for hemispheric policy (mostly the Organization of American States, OAS) since 1990, and its effects on the relationship between Canada and the region.

When examining the ebbs and flows in Canada's involvement, it becomes apparent that three main subjects, objectives, or areas of concern repeat themselves over time: democracy and governance, enhancing the welfare and prosperity of the region's peoples, and security. Canada's policy designs are but variations on these. When defining Canadian interests, these three areas are usually the ones called upon to structure the argument, and are further supported by an appeal to Canadian values. The dichotomy of interests and values is another ever-present defining trait of Canadian foreign-policy designs, where the reluctance to spell out many policy choices as interest-based leads to replacing them with the more ethereal value-based arguments.

Interests

Does Canada have interests in Latin America? Trade and investment figures paint a picture that lends itself to different interpretations.ⁱⁱ In 2006, Canada's trade with Latin America reached 39.2 billion Canadian dollars, an increase of more than 10% over the previous year, and the continuation of a trend of sustained growth. Although Canadian exports grew more than the imports (20.6%, compared with 7.7%), the trade balance with the region shows that Canada imports three times as much as it exports (29.1 and 10.2 billion Canadian dollars, respectively, for 2006).

Mexico is Canada's main trading partner in the region: it accounts for 52% of the total trade, 55% of Canada's imports from Latin America, and 43% of its exports. The 16 billion Canadian dollars in imports from Mexico in 2006 represented an increase of 9.6% over 2005, further consolidating this country as a major trading partner. Without counting those from Mexico, imports from the region represent just 5% of Canada's total (Daudelin, 2007: 19). The 4.4 billion Canadian dollars in exports to Mexico in 2006, although an

increase of 30.3% over the previous year, which make it Canada's fifth largest export market, represented a meager 1% of total exports for Canada (Daudelin, 2007: 19). The pre-eminence of Mexico as a trading partner in the region can be attributed to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). When making the case for free trade agreements paving the way for increased commercial activity, some other considerations are in order, such as the relative growth of imports to exports. Over the first ten years of Canada's bilateral FTA with Chile (1997-2006), for example, imports from Chile grew exponentially (from 325 million to 1.9 billion Canadian dollars), whereas exports only went from 392 to 473 million Canadian dollars.

The figures for Canadian investment in Latin America and the Caribbean can seem impressive (83 billion Canadian dollars in 2005) yet they are misleading. Daudelin points out that most of the investment stock is in the Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, and the Cayman Islands and is therefore susceptible to flight were such attractive fiscal regimes to change (Daudelin, 2007: 19). He adds that while the numbers and the growth rates are by no means negligible, without those four countries, Latin America currently represents a smaller share of Canada's total investment stock than it did in the mid-1990s.

As for security-based Canadian interests in the region, the case could be made for considering the ramifications of organized transnational crime and drug trafficking on Canadian cities. Hemispheric security interests, or threats, are more difficult to assess, even if one expands the concept of human security to include health-related dangers, such as pandemics, or factors in natural disasters. This is not to say that these issues are irrelevant when formulating policies, or that they should not rank high, as they do, when considering Canadian assistance and direct aid. What it means is that, overall, Latin America is not a major security concern for Canada.

Determining Factors

In an effort to identify the determining factors for the “re-discoveries” of the region, those that shape the policy decisions, the attention must focus on three possible explanatory sources: external –global– determinants, paramount among which is the relationship with the US; the events and state of affairs in the region, considering the pendulum swings in the democratization, economic liberalization and integration processes; and, what could be described as “principled policy design,” to account for actor-driven agendas, voluntarism, reactions to windows of opportunity and calls for action. These determining factors are by no means mutually exclusive.

Relations in the world

In *Discovering the Americas*, Rochlin looks at the period between the beginning of the 20th century and the Trudeau years. He analyzes how Canada’s relationship with Great Britain and with the United States collided, thereby retarding Canadian involvement in the hemisphere. Rochlin also evaluates the divergent effects of World War II on Canada and leading Latin American countries, and how Ottawa avoided a more profound relationship with the Americas until Trudeau came to power (Rochlin 11–62).

Beginning with the Trudeau years, Stevenson identifies important new factors in the international system that, through their impact on Canada, contributed to shaping relations with Latin America (Stevenson 27-58): first, the relative decline of the United States, and the subsequent decrease in the degree of influence and power it had in the immediate postwar era; second, the beginning of a fundamental structural change in the international system, illustrated by the appearance of interdependence and increased multilateralism; and third, the appearance of international social movements and issued-oriented international non-governmental organizations.

Rochlin also points to the decline in U.S. hegemony and the development of a more multipolar world as part of the international changes of the time, and examines their effects on the Liberals' foreign-policy review in 1968 and Trudeau's "Third Option" formula. Rochlin argues that within this scenario Canada deepened relations with Latin America, as it attempted to diversify trade, establish important bilateral relations with key countries in the region, and advance its multilateral presence by becoming a permanent observer at the OAS (Rochlin 11-62).

A closer look at the decision to join the OAS as a full memberⁱⁱⁱ allows a further point to be made about the influence of external determinants on policy decisions vis-à-vis the Americas; or, in the words of Gordon Mace, how "Canada's relationship to the world at large" constituted one group of factors explaining the decision (Mace). The second half of the 1980s saw all the events that signaled the eventual end of the Cold War, and how, with the ensuing remodeling of the world, two threats to Canada stood out: the uncertainties regarding U.S. trade policies, with that country's increasing economic protectionism; and the likely scenario of a world reorganized according to major economic blocs (Mace). "These threats were important contextual elements in the overall rationale leading to the decision to join the OAS" (Mace 151).

The Secretary of External Affairs at the time, Joe Clark (1984–1991), agreed that the world was becoming increasingly regional in nature, with the three major trading blocs being Europe, the Pacific, and the Americas, and that Canada should strengthen its ties with the hemisphere (McKenna 134). Yet the reality of a world consisting of regional trading blocs had already been factored into Canada's decision to seek a free-trade agreement with the United States in 1985. The possibility of a Mexico–US FTA created the danger of a hub-and-spoke scenario, with two asymmetrical FTAs in North America. Canada had to think beyond this strategy, and stronger involvement in hemispheric affairs made sense (Mace 151-156).

Another consequence of the end of the Cold War vis-à-vis the decision to join the OAS is also pointed out by Rochlin: With the dissipation of the western agenda of fighting communism, Canada would not find itself immersed in military adventures through its OAS membership, especially since full membership no longer implied becoming a signatory to the Rio Treaty (Rochlin 192).

State of the region

A second, important determinant for explaining Canada's look to the south is the state of affairs in the region; the democratization, economic liberalization, and integration processes contributing to explain the ebbs and flows in Canadian involvement in the hemisphere. After Trudeau's expressed intent of increasing ties with Latin America, at the end of the 1960's, the two decades that followed and the events that characterized the region prove a compelling explanation for Canada's relative withdrawal from—and the specific exceptions of action in—the region, and the eventual comeback towards the end of the 1980s.

Summarizing the time period following the Trudeau government's 1970 foreign-policy statement, Daudelin points out how the countries of the region, mostly fledging and poor democracies, stumbled into inflation, recession, and political crises that resulted in military regimes, insurrections, and civil wars in Central America, and economic crises (Daudelin, 2003). Canadian public opinion became sensitized to the plight of many countries in the south as Canada received an influx of political migrants. For the government, to justify ties or an effort towards more involvement with dictatorships in the hemisphere—dictatorships that were tolerated, if not supported, by the United States—was simply not an option.

During the 1980s, the Latin American debt crisis—and the Canadian recession—halted what little progress had been made on the economic front. The crisis triggered a reaction, however, that would eventually lead to what Rochlin calls the ideological

convergence between Canada and the region (Rochlin 192). On a multilateral level, the OAS had failed to deal with several problems in the hemisphere, and new ad-hoc arrangements began to emerge to tackle some pressing issues. Top amongst these issues were the Central American wars, which brought Canada back into an active role in the region.

The changes that took place throughout the 1980s created a foundation for the rediscovery of the region that followed, and for Canada becoming a full member of the OAS. Many countries embarked on fundamental changes to their economic policies, which were accompanied by the emergence of, or return to, liberal democracy. This ideological convergence reduced the “likelihood of Canada being caught between frequent battles with Latin America on one side and the US on the other” (Rochlin 192). It was now feasible for the government to engage with democracies in the region, thus pleasing activists and groups opposed to dealings with dictatorships, while garnering support from business promoting a hemispheric-shared agenda of economic liberalization.

Doing the right thing

Another determining factor for Canada’s sporadic focus on the Americas can be found under the umbrella of principled policy design—those initiatives based on value arguments, actor-driven agendas, or taking advantage of a window of opportunity or a call for action. Although none of these factors is a sufficient explanation *per se* for policy decisions regarding the hemisphere, they partially account for inconsistencies and the lack of continuity over time. This has often been the case once the triggering factor, be it a person in a position of power or a given set of circumstances, changes.

It is along those lines that the role of Trudeau and his strong personal imprimatur on policy helps to explain the weight given to the Americas in the 1970 Liberal foreign-policy review. In a different context, the involvement of the Secretary of External Affairs in the Mulroney government, Joe Clark, with his counterparts in the ad-hoc multilateral groups created to deal with the Central American crises of the 1980s, translated in his commitment

to the region and becoming instrumental in the decision to join the OAS. Clark's belief in Canada's capacity to revitalize the multilateral organization was an important part of the strategic choice that prioritized this forum as the main stage for the country's hemispheric policies.

There are many more instances that illustrate how some actors can, acting through their convictions and beliefs, define the agenda of a nation and its role within international organizations. Within the OAS, for example, Canada's agenda of promoting democracy and its emphasis on human security can be traced to a great extent to the personal priorities of Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy (1996-2000), just as the shift to a more trade-centred agenda can be linked to John Manley's tenure at the helm of the department (2000-2004) (Randall 234-235).

Sustained contingency-policy planning and the readiness to react to unforeseen circumstances have been critical on those occasions when Canada has been called upon to act decisively in the hemisphere. Answering calls for action by joining multilateral initiatives to deal with conflicts in the region, or responding to natural disasters in other countries, are examples of the kind of involvement that is consistent with a long tradition of international assistance. These actions do not constitute a region-specific approach, but they do contribute significantly to the perception of Canada held by the countries in the region.

Strategic Choices

To better understand the ebbs and flows of Canada's relations with the hemisphere, the strategic choices for policy implementation, and supporting and prioritizing initiatives need to be considered. Given their overwhelming pre-eminence in defining the relationship with the region, the following elements illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Canadian involvement in hemispheric affairs: the OAS as a chosen arena consistent with the multilateral ideal; the Free Trade Area of the Americas as an initiative, and its links with the

Summit of the Americas process; and the promotion of democracy as a cornerstone of our principle-based actions.

OAS: The Chosen Arena

Prior to Canada's decision to become part of it, the OAS had a long history that had resulted in the discredit of the Organization in the eyes of Latin American countries, seriously calling into question its ability to deal with hemispheric issues, and lessening the commitment and support of the governments of the region. Other hemispheric institutions had proved to be much more effective tools in an inter-American system, such as the Pan American Health Organization, founded in 1902, or the Inter-American Development Bank, the oldest and largest regional development bank, founded in 1959, both of which Canada joined in 1972.

When it comes to hemispheric multilateral initiatives and the resistance they have encountered throughout the region, the explanation is to be found in the hegemonic role played by the US –as epitomized by several resolutions within the OAS– and, directly linked to this, in two principles deeply entrenched in the Latin American countries: non-intervention and sovereignty.

Canada well understood the limitations of the OAS, its ineffectiveness, and its lack of legitimacy. Mace points out that “the basic rationale that was traditionally used against joining the OAS was still valid in the second half of the 1980s” (Mace 143-146). Hence, the decision to join the OAS represented a fundamental change of policy, one that had to be explained by other factors (Mace 143-155).^{iv} For McKenna, on the other hand, it was a subtle change, a matter of choosing different “means” for dealing with inter-American affairs: “changes in ‘what’ will be done and ‘how’ relations with the hemisphere will be conducted, while leaving the principal goals of the Canadian Government—such as regional stability, democratic development and economic prosperity—largely intact” (McKenna 132-133). For Stevenson, the decision was part of a gradual development that began with the

release of Trudeau's foreign policy review in 1970 and was directly linked to the increasing importance of multilateral forums during the 1980s, resulting from the renewal of Canada's internationalism: "Canadian multilateralism in the hemisphere grew steadily and incrementally, and in this sense, it did not represent a new direction, only the culmination of an old one" (Stevenson 182). Still, Stevenson considers that the decision "was devoid of a coherent or comprehensive policy outlining the government's intentions" (Stevenson 183).

Regardless of whether or not the decision was an expression of continuity, a minor departure, or a major shift—made within a clear policy framework or in the absence of one—once Canada joined the OAS, the subsequent increase in Canadian involvement in the hemisphere unequivocally privileged the multilateral forum as the venue of choice. This over-emphasis on the multilateral option would, in the long run, hinder the success of some of our initiatives. Canada set out, during the very first year of full membership, to accomplish many objectives and achieved considerable progress in the initial stages. These objectives are listed by Rochlin and included revitalizing the institution, strengthening democratic development, creating the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, and fortifying specialized agencies focused on "so-called non-traditional issues" (Rochlin 194).

Championing the FTAA

Since it was launched at the Miami Summit in 1994, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) became intrinsically linked to the Summit Process; indeed, their fates bound together. Canada pushed hard for the FTAA, and although "we are not a one-note wonder in the Americas" (Peter Boehm, interview with author),^v promoting the trade initiative became so central to our agenda that when it collapsed, Daudelin argues, it came as no surprise that Canada somehow lost interest in the hemisphere (Daudelin, 2007: 17). The process by which Canada went from embracing the FTAA initiative to assuming the leading role in its promotion illustrates both the unpredictable dynamics of hemispheric affairs, and how counterproductive it can be to centre too much effort on one single policy.

When the initial endorsement and shared excitement of the governments of the hemisphere subsided, it soon became apparent that the FTAA had fewer champions than it had at first seemed. Once the global multilateral trade process took a decisive step forward with the creation of the World Trade Organization, and the North American Free Trade Agreement was in place, the United States' interest declined. The major economies in Latin America developed plans of their own—Mexico, already part of NAFTA, launched an aggressive trade diversification strategy, signing multiple FTAs, and Brazil focused on Mercosur as part of its South American leadership strategy. Daudelin says that Canada, contrary to its Latin American counterparts, devoted itself to making the FTAA work. He concludes that “the paradox of it all, from the standpoint of Canada’s policy, is that, having assumed that economic integration was taking place and that Canada had no choice but to join in, the Canadian government found itself largely alone in promoting it” (Daudelin, 2003: 637-666).

After its 1994 launch at the First Summit of the Americas in Miami, it was inevitable that the controversial FTAA initiative would be seen as dominating the agenda of the Summit process. Referring to the 2000 OAS General Assembly in Windsor, Ontario, as an example, Peter Boehm notes that “all the papers were saying it was a meeting of Foreign Ministers about free trade; it was anything but that. We explained it wasn’t. When they saw one resolution on the final declaration (a rollover one) they said: ‘aha!’” (Peter Boehm, interview with author). The FTAA had become a “lightning rod in the Canadian and international debate” (Randall 242), overshadowing other initiatives that were arguably equally relevant to Canadian hemispheric policies. The Quebec Summit of 2001 and the signing, later that year, of the Inter-American Democratic Charter further illustrate this point.

Promoting democracy

Democracy promotion matters to Canada, and our actions in the region around this objective showcase both successes and failures. The former have been achieved through sustained and decisive commitment; the latter can be traced to retreat and to downgrading of our efforts. Upon joining the OAS in 1990, Canada proposed the creation of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD). Since then, the OAS has had its own wavering commitment to a democratic hemisphere, from the highpoints of decisive action in, at different times, Haiti and Peru, to the creation and adoption of such a unique document as the Inter-American Democratic Charter (Pastor 15-29; Cooper 31-43; Legler 61-73; Cameron 101-116), to the recent downgrading of the UPD within the organization and its return to a limited electoral-observation role, and to the passiveness and ambiguity vis-à-vis the re-emergence of authoritarianism in the hemisphere. These highs and lows correlate directly with Canada's involvement.

Although, as Andrew Cooper points out, "Canada did not seek or expect ownership in the making of the Charter" (Cooper 31), this initiative, originally proposed by former Secretary General of the United Nations Javier Perez de Cuellar of Peru, would not have come to fruition without decisive Canadian diplomacy. Maxwell Cameron goes as far as saying that "the proposal might have amounted to nothing but for the initiative of Marc Lortie, the Canadian "Sherpa" (the representative of the Prime Minister with overall responsibility for the summit) of the Quebec City Summit of the Americas, who pushed for a "democracy clause" in the summit declaration" (Cameron 2). The years 2000 and 2001 were stellar moments for Canada's commitment to democracy in the Americas, either because the country was host to the OAS General Assembly (in June 2000, in Windsor, Ontario) and the Summit of the Americas, and its actions simply "mirrored the degree to which it was on the diplomatic spotlight" (Cooper 32); or because of the confluence of determining factors, previously alluded to in this paper (i.e., the existing state of affairs in the region and the room for principled policy design).

The Quebec Summit was the pinnacle of a steady and consistent set of initiatives and actions developed throughout Canada's first decade as a full member of the OAS. The UPD moved along a path of increasing responsibilities, from monitoring elections to playing a role indicative of its full potential in the context of the Peruvian crisis of 2000; the consensus that enabled the adoption of the Democratic Charter was built, to a great extent, upon the successful outcome of that episode. But consensus in the hemisphere has always been elusive and short-lived, as the FTAA initiative was already proving in 2001, and the commitment to the promotion of democracy was no exception. It was clear from the very beginning, for example, that the Venezuelan regime opposed the Charter because it did not acknowledge "participatory" democracy as a valid alternative, just as it had opposed the High Level OAS Mission to Peru.^{vi} In 2005, at the OAS XXXV General Assembly in Florida, the United States overstepped the willingness of other countries in the region and its democracy-monitoring initiatives were rejected, mostly because they were seen as being contrary to the principles of non-intervention and sovereignty. Since then, the limitations for deriving practical action implementation from the Charter have become increasingly apparent, as has the countries' reluctance to tackle the issue.

A "New" Approach

Although the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has not undertaken an overall foreign-policy review, it has introduced noticeable shifts since coming into power in early 2006. The renewed focus on the hemisphere represents one of those shifts, although arguably more in the context of a redefinition of the priority regions than as a change in policy content. The guidelines for Canada's re-engagement mentioned below are taken from the speeches delivered by Foreign Minister Peter Mackay^{vii}); and while these contain references to the Americas Strategy, no such document has been released publicly so far. The guidelines are centred on four issues: the consolidation of regional democratic

advancement with a commitment to strengthening democratic governance; the addressing of security challenges from terrorism and crime to health and environmental concerns; trade and investment agendas; and the enhancement of the capacity of multilateral organizations—namely the OAS, the Summit of the Americas process, and the Inter-American Development Bank—to further the agenda of democracy, prosperity, and equity.

Regarding democracy consolidation and democratic governance, Canada “will support democracies that work in the interests of people and promote duly elected congresses, through fair and transparent processes, independent courts, and fair constitutions” (Minister Mackay’s, 2 February 2007; and, 25 May 2007). On the security front, the emphasis is on addressing “problems that flow across borders, such as drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, youth gangs, illegal immigration, refugee flows, infectious diseases and natural disasters” (Minister Mackay, 2 February 2007; and, 25 May 2007), acknowledging that measures to this effect “contribute directly to the security on our own streets at home, particularly in large urban centres like Toronto and Montreal” (Minister Mackay, 2 February 2007; and, 25 May 2007). The stated goal on trade and investment is to act on the potential of the region, represented by “a young demographic, growing middle class, rising GDP, abundant natural resources, and new and exciting technologies” (Minister Mackay, 2 February 2007; and, 25 May 2007), through greater trade liberalization and regional economic integration. One highlighted challenge within this agenda is the “competitiveness gap” in the hemisphere, which is linked to a broader concept because it “is [also] about solid legal and financial institutions, healthy and educated populations, and free, functioning and responsive societies” (Minister Mackay, 2 February, 2007; and 25 May 2007). Finally, with respect to enhancing the capacity of hemispheric multilateral organizations, the case is more of a reiteration of Canada’s already existing commitments, mostly to being one of the main economic contributors, but also to a very diversified agenda of other issues, including civil society participation, gender equality, indigenous rights, etc.

Conclusion

An examination of the region's current affairs, and the broader context within which this rediscovery occurs, paints a picture of re-emerging uncertainties and structural problems that run deep in Latin America (Daudelin, 2007: 3-16). This reality is bound to test Canada's announced re-engagement and its sustainability. There is room within our hemisphere for Canada to play a more influential role, furthering our interests while shaping its future, but it demands decisive, long-term commitments and sharp negotiating skills (Torres, 2006).

In trying to identify the macro-trends in political developments in the hemisphere, three issues are at the forefront: 1) beyond left/right dichotomies, Latin American countries are in search of their own solutions to reconciling economic growth with poverty reduction, with varying degrees of commitment to democracy and democratic institutions; 2) everyone in South America is talking about integration, albeit from contrasting points of view. In the midst of a regional leadership contest, integration appears to serve all sides; and 3) the integration drive is mainly confined to South America, thus deepening the North/South divide in the hemisphere, and comes at a time when the divisions between and within countries in Latin America are increasingly manifest (Torres, 2007).

Canada's approach should be pragmatic, clearly assessing what is achievable within our resources and our weight in the hemisphere. This approach acknowledges that, as former Prime Minister Joe Clark said, "for all our growth and innovation, Canada has relatively less influence in trade and economics than we have in politics and diplomacy" (Clark). We need to have an independent policy from that of the United States, as it would better serve our shared interests while positioning us as a valid interlocutor and partner for multilateral initiatives with countries of the region. Ideally, such an approach would pave the way for Canadian interests through multiple initiatives, enhancing trade, business, and

investment opportunities for our private sector to act upon. It would also reassess the balance between multilateral and bilateral options and identify our strategic long-term partners, by understanding that “by differentiating among players, setting clear priorities and using multilateralism as a complement to rather than a substitute for bilateral policies, Canada could increase the effectiveness of its diplomatic efforts” (Rozenal).

The points noted above are only broad strokes, the kind of general ideas and principles that we have had no shortage of in the decades of ebbs and flows in our relations with the hemisphere. The real difference between today and all previous “discoveries” of the region lies in the apparent contradiction between how, by being less ambitious, and transformative of the region and its institutions we aim to be, we could define a much more sustainable, consistent, and long-term commitment, one that fulfills the expectations we generate. The region rightly expects more from Canada—in the past we have made grand gestures, and achieved important results, only to withdraw when we are most needed. Thus, we run the risk of running out of political credibility—and the region will not forgive us for yet another retreat.

Endnotes

ⁱA thorough historical review of Canada–Americas relations can be found in Rochlin, James, (1994) “Discovering the Americas: the evolution of Canadian foreign policy towards Latin America” Vancouver: UBC Press. For an equally thorough account of events in the period 1968-1990, see Stevenson, Brian J. R., (2000) “Canada, Latin America, and the New Internationalism: a foreign policy analysis, 1968-1990” Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

ⁱⁱ Trade and investment figures included in the paper were obtained from Statistics Canada data, or quoted from the Latin Business Chronicle June, 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ The decision was made on 4 October 1989 and became effective on 8 January 1990.

^{iv} Those other factors, as discussed, were “the changes in the world, particularly, in the world economy at the time, and the particular dynamics in the Americas during the second half of the 1980s.”

^v Peter Boehm, Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and the Prime Minister’s Personal Representative for the 2005 Summit of the Americas, interviewed by the author, Embassy newspaper, Ottawa, 23 November 2005

^{vi} It is ironic that the Venezuelan government garnered support condemning the April 2002 coup by invoking the Charter it opposed.

^{vii} Minister Mackay's addresses to the Latin American Heads of Mission in Ottawa, 2 February 2007; and, at the Canadian Club of Toronto, 25 May 2007

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