

Presentation by

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Canada and the New American Empire:

Introduction:

Tonight, I will try to set the context for this conference. I will focus on the US in the world, primarily, and in doing so I will:

- dispute the conference assumption that the US is an empire;
- discuss US exceptionalism and the growing gulf between the US self-perception and the perception of others of the US;
- outline the serious flaws in the US National Security Strategy, as demonstrated by the Iraq war and its aftermath;
- reflect on the international significance of the recent US election and on the “values” issue;
- suggest a policy framework for Canadian policy vis-à-vis the US;
- give (unsolicited) advice to the Prime Minister on how to handle the imminent visit of President Bush to Ottawa.

The United States: Empire, Hegemon or What?

Is the United States an Empire? The question is more than just rhetorical, because the sub text of the empire debate in Canada is that we had better accommodate ourselves to US foreign policy if we know what’s good for us. While the empire debate is back, mostly among academics, it is difficult to make the argument persuasively that the US is an empire, certainly not in any conventional meaning of the word, i.e., “a large state or group of states under a single sovereign”, according to the (American) Webster’s dictionary. Since the UN Charter proscribed “the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” and since the last vestiges of colonialism largely disappeared in the Fifties and Sixties, thanks in part to Paul Martin, Sr., few countries have even contemplated the conquest of others and still fewer have attempted it, although admittedly some might argue that that is what happened in Iraq.

British historian Niall Ferguson has observed, with apparent disappointment that most Americans are not very taken with the idea of empire, much less with its duties. According to the 9/11 Commission, only six American graduated last year with a degree in Arabic from an American university. Not many young Americans are evidently preparing themselves for lifetimes of administering distant lands. The reality is that the American people are not interested in empire. The imperatives of empire conflict with the myths of Americanism and the myths trump all. The U.S. was born anti-imperial, and remains anti-imperial in its soul, its late-nineteenth century experimentation with colonialism and its all too frequent interference in Latin America notwithstanding. Also, beyond Cuba, how much popular pressure is there now to interfere direct in the affairs of other countries? Not even the acolytes of Empire, see the US as an empire in the literal sense. That is why we read of “Empire Lite”, “Incoherent Empire”, “Inadvertent Empire”, “Sorrow’s Empire”, “Fear’s Empire”, “After the Empire”, “Colossus”, “Rogue

Nation”, “The New Imperialism” and “The Unconquerable World” to cite only some of the titles in current circulation.

None of the more contemporary conceptions of empire, of a world run indirectly from Washington, strikes me as especially convincing, either. The fact is that the 60 plus years since the end of the Second World War have seen unprecedented cooperative international institution-building, treaty-making and network-developing. This extraordinary global integration has changed the way the world thinks about international relations, and the way it manages them. The United States is by the far the *primus inter pares*, but it is nonetheless very much part of this enormously complex and comprehensive network of networks.

The world has become too complex and the United States has become too dependent on others (as others are on the US), to transcend the system or to determine, itself, its outcomes. The fact is that we all live in an increasingly globalized, integrated, interdependent world that requires cooperative management to function effectively and that no single country, not even the United States has the capacity to run this world alone even if it wants to. Happily, notwithstanding the aspirations of a few hard-headed, soft-handed Washington consultants, commentators, misplaced Canadian speech writers and other vicarious imperialists, there is scant evidence that most Americans want to. Moreover, the US is the world’s greatest debtor, going progressively and quickly deeper into debt. The historical experience regarding the long term viability of debtor-empires must not be encouraging from a new-conservative perspective

The simple truth is that as the most powerful country in history, the US does not have unqualified latitude to act. Militarily, the US can, and more or less does, match the rest of the world combined; economically, it is the biggest single entity; and culturally, its influence is pervasive. The US is too strong to be challenged militarily by any rival country or combination of rival countries for the reasonably foreseeable future, (if any wanted to do so, for which there is no evidence). At the same time, the US is not strong enough to determine, alone, the course of world events. As the situation in Iraq demonstrates beyond any doubt, US power does not create its own reality. Most significantly, in an age of asymmetric warfare, the US is invincible but, as 9/11 tragically demonstrated, not invulnerable. Cooperation with others is indispensable if the US is to assure its own security.

Finally, and most basically, if America is an empire, who are its subjects, and why are they not obeying? The extent of international cooperation with the US in the war in Iraq, or its aftermath, is hardly consistent with imperial power. Canada, arguably the most likely candidate for domination, 80% plus dependent on the US market for its prosperity, as the doom-and-gloom, integrationist, trade-policy-is-foreign-policy and grand-bargain schools never tire of reminding us, never felt obliged to sign up. Nor are there any certifiable consequences from our having stood aside, a few minor, in the overall scheme of things, contracts notwithstanding. The evidence is that we can maintain an independent foreign policy. If we know what’s good for us; in fact, we must.

US Foreign Policy, the End of Checks and Balances and Exceptionalism

In the US, the exercise of power domestically is governed by a system of checks and balances. The US founding fathers thought it unwise to entrust full power to the country's executive or to any branch of government. Internationally, other powers have exercised the same restricting role. American foreign policy elites progressively have come to realize after the demise of the Soviet Union, however, that externally US power no longer faces many check or balance.

American will and capacity for international leadership grew at a time while others, particularly other industrialized countries were content to see Washington lead if it wanted to, in part because of the US's sheer capacity to do so, in part because others say (and still see) no international threat to themselves or, less noble, no obligation to others requiring heavy investments in military capability. As a consequence of the leadership role that others readily conceded to the US, and because of the considerable costs and risks of its self-appointed mission to propagate democracy, many in Washington on both sides of the political aisle came increasingly to see the US as bearing a disproportionate burden and meriting exceptional dispensations from international law and norms.

The notion of America-as-exceptional dates from the Puritan migration and has ebbed and flowed in the American psyche ever since. US "exceptionalism" was given modern currency in the 1980's when President Ronald Reagan borrowed from the Puritans and from the Bible for his favoured metaphor of the United States as the "shining city on a hill". American "exceptionalism" unquestionably has its positive as well as its negative characteristics. The US has exercised exceptional leadership, for example, in the development of international law and in the preservation of stability, particularly among Japan, China and Russia in North-East Asia.

It is more self-serving expressions of exceptionalism, however, that have inter alia, led to an American questioning of the applicability of the UN Charter, indeed of international law writ large, to the United States. US opposition to the International Criminal Court, took exceptionalism to extreme lengths, an unvarnished and unapologetic US effort to codify one law for the goose and another for the gander.

It was not always thus. At the end of the Second World War, the US bestrode the world even more colossally than it does today. In 1945, the US share of the world economy was about 40%; today, its about 32% (22% at purchasing power parity). In 1945, US defence spending totaled in constant dollars approximately \$900 Billion; that that figure is \$400 Billion. President Truman, nevertheless, told the assembled UN delegates in San Francisco in 1945 that "[w]e all have to recognize that no matter how great our strength, we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please". Now, some Americans expect to lead not by example but by exemption.

The gulf between many Americans' perception of their country and the perception of it by the rest of the world is becoming dangerously wide. At the Democratic

convention, Senator Kerry said: “The USA never goes to war because it wants to. We only go to war because we have to.” President Bush said not long before that at a Memorial Day commemoration: “it is not in our nature to seek out wars and conflicts. We only get involved when adversaries have left us no alternative.”

Sometimes, for example, with respect to World War II, this self-perception is true. But, overall, to put it most charitably, history cannot carry the weight of these assertions. There were the Mexican War, Nicaragua (several times), the Spanish American War, the Philippines War, Cuba (several times), Panama (several times), Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, China, Viet Nam, Cambodia and Iraq. Nor has the US championed democracy consistently. There was Iran in the ‘50’s, and the overthrow of Mossadeq, the democratically elected leader, an act still being paid for today. The Congo in the ‘60’s and the overthrow of Patrice Lumumba, its democratically elected leader, and Chile in the 70’s and the overthrow of Salvatore Allende, its democratically elected leader. Alliance with tyrants, notably in the Middle East, has often taken precedence over support for democratic reformers. In the amnesiac West, we have “moved on” with scarcely a backward glance. In the countries concerned, however, and there are many, these events are part of the national narrative, and not a positive part.

At the Republican convention, Senator Libby Dole proclaimed that America was great because its people are good. For others, though, the issue is not whether Americans are innately good people, believing in family values, guided by religious faith and even generous. They are. The issue is that they are human, and capable of error and avarice like everyone else.

9/11 and the 2002 National Security Strategy

It is difficult to exaggerate the shock of 9/11 to the American national psyche. A country that was determined to use high cost, high technology means to make itself invulnerable found itself attacked out of the blue by an enemy using low cost, low technology weapons, with horrific consequences. The Bush administration responded with the 2002 US National Security Strategy. Washington persuaded itself that US security could best, in fact, only be assured by American military power. Neither treaties nor international law nor institutions, including the United Nations and NATO, were deemed to be either relevant to protecting US interests or necessary to confer legitimacy on US action.

There was little in the world’s response to 9/11 to warrant such unilateralism. Much of the National Security Strategy is readily acceptable to most governments, especially to most democratic governments. The problem lies in its unilateralist, preventive posture and the intent it expresses to preserve US dominance perpetually. The National Security Strategy talks of preemption, which is permitted under customary international law, but the US has been acting in ways that amount to prevention, which is not.

The difference is not just legalistic hair splitting. Pre-emption requires much more rigorous tests than prevention does, as regards the capability and intent of an adversary to do harm, the urgency of the need for self-defence and the absence of reasonable alternatives. Iraq is seen, correctly, as the first exercise of the policy of prevention. The war in Iraq actually was preventative – to bring down a tyrant with potentially malevolent intentions and suspected capabilities to act on those intentions. As Michael Ignatief contended in a recent New York Times Magazine article, military intervention was presented, however, as pre-emptive – to stop a tyrant already possessing weapons of mass destruction and preparing to use them imminently.

The proponents of unilateralism disregard the lessons of World War II on the advantages of collective security and hold the norms and laws established in the wake of the bloodiest conflict in history to be irrelevant to contemporary security. In a post 9/11 world of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, it is enough that a US Administration says a danger is gathering for it to set aside international law and attack the prospective perpetrator. Some academics, including some Canadian academics, have talked admiringly of a new grand strategy, of a combination of John Quincy Adams and Woodrow Wilson, of putting unilateral power at the service of universal principle. But what happens if others claim the same right of prevention as the United States does? If everyone takes the initiative to prevent harm to themselves, where does it end? In a world that US power cannot control, these are not trivial questions, including for the US, and particularly for Canada.

Perhaps the most glaring problem with this new grand strategy and with the impulses of contemporary US foreign policy to take flight to the terrorist is the unrealistic assessment that the US can go it along effectively. That theory is unraveling in the harsh political science laboratory of Iraq. In attacking Iraq despite the sketchiest of links between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime and despite having no hard evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and over the objections of undoubtedly the great majority of UN members, the US isolated itself in world public opinion.

When Washington declared war on terrorism, essentially on a heinous tactic but a tactic nonetheless, not on a tangible enemy as the Al Qaeda network that could be defeated, Washington gave itself mission impossible. In portraying terrorism in monolithic terms – a terrorist is a terrorist. Without reference to political context or root causes, the US put itself in dubious company. Further, indefinite US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan and mostly uncritical American support for Israel, will not necessarily morph into a conflict of the West versus Islam. But there is a danger that it will and that danger would be unwise to ignore.

Around the world, US foreign policy itself has come to be seen by many as part of the problem. That is not to exculpate the Islamic terrorists for the atrocities they have perpetrated. Nor is it to condone the complicity of those governments that have made it possible for the extremists to survive and flourish. It is to say that it is in the interest of Americans that Washington be more cognizant of the views of others and more

circumspect about the impact of US foreign policy on others. Circumspection about US policy is also in the Canadian interest.

The US Election and America's Standing in the World

Others at this conference will be in a better position to talk about the meaning of "values" in the recent election. It seems clear now that the exit polls were pretty misleading on this issue, partly because of the way the question was posed. A number of factors were bundled together under "value" while other issues such as "security" were disaggregated.

When terrorism, Iraq and security were similarly bundled together they become the largest category, motivating 34% of the voters, as compared 22% of moral values, which also trailed aggregated economic issues as 25%. It is clear that most Americans political colouration is purple, albeit reddish purple. Many Americans seem to have been motivated to vote for President Bush because they felt he was more like them than Senator Kerry was. Nevertheless, the values issue was more than the margin of victory and, in voting for President Bush, they effectively endorsed the Iraq war that broke international law, caused literally uncounted deaths (at least 16,000 Iraqi civilians, although a recent Lancet article estimated the number at nearly 100,000) and isolated the US in world opinion.

The election results make it more difficult to make a distinction between the American people and the Administration that prosecuted the war in the faces of widespread international opposition. In a sense, they have validated the anti-Americanism that has been evident around the world. Recent public opinion polls reveal that many people abroad no longer give Americans the benefit of the doubt.

Even before the election, there were plenty of signs that the US standing in the world was at its nadir. An official US government commission led by Ed Djerejian, a former US Ambassador to Israel and Syria, reported a few months ago "the bottom has indeed dropped out of support for the United States" in the Moslem world. Polls conducted by the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press in April of this year shows that "a year after the war in Iraq, international discontent with America and its policies [had] intensified rather than diminished." A poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes of the University of Maryland in the course of the recent elections found that 72% of President Bush's supporters continued to believe that Iraq had actual WMD (47%) or a major program for developing them (24%). Similarly, 75% of President Bush's supporters continued to believe that Iraq was providing substantial support to Al Qaeda, and 63% believed that clear evidence of this support had been found. This outcome postdated the interim Kay report on WMD, the Duelfer final report on WMD, the Senate Intelligence Committee report and the 9/11 Commission report. The US truly has a faith-based foreign policy.

Canadian Foreign Policy

In light of all of this, what should Canada do? I think there are two things that are necessary, not easy to accomplish, but possible.

First, we have to remember that however serious our reservations about US foreign policy are, and that are serious, the Americans are our neighbours and our customers. They have suffered a grievous loss and there is a danger that they could do so again. Bilaterally, therefore, we need to be the best neighbours possible.

In particular, we need to do everything reasonably possible to ensure that we do not inadvertently increase the risks they face. This means enhanced coastal surveillance cooperation, the forward inspection of containers, cooperation in deterring and preventing travelers with fraudulent travel documents, enhanced border surveillance, etc.

It, also, means an order-of-magnitude better communications in the US, to Congress and to the general public, informing them that we are doing everything possible to safeguard their security. If there is ever another Ressay incident, we had better have begun our communications plan beforehand. Regrettably, thanks to Ressay and ineffectual Canadian communications, the average American, and probably the average Congressman, still sees Canada as soft on terror.

Second, we have to maintain an independent foreign policy. Canada has never in its 137 year history been better able to afford an effective foreign policy. That means invest in the three D's – diplomacy, defense and development assistance with the "two m's"- "more money." We particularly have to put our money where our mouth is on humanitarian intervention, starting with Darfur. We have a national interest in a functioning, effective, rules-based international system. The UN, the World Bank, the IMF, NATO – all were created in another time, to manage the problems of another time. We need a foreign policy primarily to promote both the renovation and the innovation of the international system of governance.

At the UN, a panel of wise men has just given the secretary general a series of recommendations for reconciling the principle of national sovereignty with the imperatives of international intervention. We need to rally international support for these recommendations. Central to the panel's report is the precept of the responsibility to protect the innocent when their governments will not or cannot protect them, a precept developed under Canadian leadership.

President Bush is coming to Canada ostensibly at least as part of an effort to reach out to countries that disagree with Washington on the war in Iraq. We should not manage the Canada-US agenda, we should treat each issue on its merits and call them as we see them. We should not shrink from agreeing with the Americans when they are right. And, equally, we should not shrink from disagreeing with them when they are wrong.

Advice on the Visit of President Bush

The following are a few simple guidelines for a successful visit.

1. Do remind President Bush that we are determined to be a good, secure neighbour. Remind him that we are doing everything reasonably possible to prevent Canada's becoming a backdoor for terrorists into the US. Remind him of how much we are doing to enhance our common security, particularly as it regards to the border. Make sure the traveling White House press corps gets the message too.
2. Remind President Bush that on a number of social issues the attitudes of at least, and the values as well, of our respective citizens are divergent and that this aspect of our relations will need sensitive management by both sides.
3. Remind him as well that the longer the softwood lumber, beef and other disputes go on the more they are hurting ordinary Canadians and the more US protectionist policies, and the US itself, are resented here.
4. In receiving President Bush courteously—incivility is in any case correct stand we took on the Iraq war. We really did mean it when we disapproved.
5. Do make the point that real friends don't just smile and acquiesce when friends are making a mistake, especially a major mistake.
6. Remind him of how much we are cooperating on re-building Afghanistan and what we are prepared to do in Iraq, too, but take care not to let Canadian foreign policy become too closely aligned with Washington. Do not acquiesce in requests to put Canadians, soldiers or election monitors, on the ground in Iraq.
7. Resist making any premature promises on BMD. Since we jointly agree that NORAD would provide missile detection and tracking information to the BMD interceptor operations, the urgency of going further has diminished.
8. Do also continue to persuade him on the merits of your idea of creating an L20. It is potentially a very significant innovation in international affairs and potentially very useful to a President who has perhaps become aware of how isolated his administration has become and how counterproductive that is.
9. Do try to persuade President Bush to take the lead in reforming the multilateral system, especially the UN. Perhaps you can remind him that the US was even more powerful than it is today when Franklin Roosevelt took the lead in creating the multilateral system.
10. Do assure him that we will go on speaking truth to power.