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Can Canada Have a Grand Strategy?

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By

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Great Powers can have Grand Strategies. Alliances can have Grand Strategies. This we know. In June 1940, Britain and its Commonwealth-Empire was left to fight against a triumphant Germany singlehanded and thus devoted all its military, industrial, diplomatic, and financial resources to the survival of its home base and some key strategic outposts while trying to persuade the United States into the war, an aim achieved in December 1941. This was Grand Strategy, and it succeeded. And after Pearl Harbor, Britain and the United States decided to defeat Hitler first before concentrating their power against Japan. Germany directly threatened Britain and the Soviet Union, and its military and industrial power far exceeded that of Imperial Japan which could be fended off with subsidiary forces. This Grand Strategy was successful.

Then, after the war, as the Soviet Union became a threat, the US and its allies followed a Grand Strategy of containment, mobilizing alliances and resources to prevent Moscow from extending its control into Western Europe and the parts of Asia and Africa into which its reach did not extend. This Grand Strategy also succeeded four decades later in bringing down the USSR, a signal victory without a general war (though there were still limited wars with terrible costs) and a demonstration that skillfully wielded economic and military power can destroy an empire. Thus, there can be no doubt that Grand Strategies can be derived, followed, and be successful – by Great Powers or great alliances.

Similarly as we watch the United States lurch and stagger about in the Middle East and North Africa today, the absence of a credible Grand Strategy can lead to the loss of allies and, perhaps, the triumph of enemies. To be successful, therefore, a Grand Strategy must be clear and potent enough to sustain itself in the face of setbacks and be seen as such by those small nations that seek shelter in a Great Power alliance. In other words, Grand Strategies can fail or turn out to be not so grand.

But can a small or middle power have a Grand Strategy? Former diplomat Daryl Copeland defined Grand Strategy as “a unifying, long-term vision of a country’s global values and interests; an expression of where the country is, and where it wants to go in the world; and an analysis of its potential and capacity to achieve its objective. I consider it a core element of statecraft.” That sounds difficult to derive for most nation-states, but to me it does not sound like Grand Strategy, at least not for smaller powers.

Smaller countries can fight wars against other smaller powers or manoeuvre to avoid them. They can join Great Power alliances or not. They can follow particular economic policies or decide not to. But – and here I disagree with the able former Defence minister David Pratt in his Ellis Lectures at the University of Calgary – they do not have Grand Strategies because they lack the human, industrial, and military resources to sustain them. In other words, the God of Grand Strategy is only found on the side of the big battalions.

But small countries do have, like every other state, national interests, and their policies are (or should be) focussed on advancing or protecting these interests and on their national survival. For example, Canada has in the past skilfully balanced the aims of Britain and the United States against each other in an effort to keep Britain interested enough in the Dominion to prevent it being swallowed by the United States. This worked so long as Britain had military, economic, and diplomatic power, but by the summer of 1940, as Britain lay naked before the Nazis, Canada in the interest of its own survival had no option but to scramble to tie its defences to those of the US and the next year to integrate its war economy with that of its neighbour. If balance in the North Atlantic Triangle had been a Grand Strategy, by 1940 it was a strategy in shreds. The psychological impact of this failed Grand Strategy, if that is what it was, might be

seen in the bitter writings of Canadian Tory nationalists like historian Donald Creighton and W.L. Morton.

Canada then tried in the postwar years to keep Britain and Europe alive as a counterweight to overweening American power. The creation of NATO and the successful Canadian effort to get Article 2 into the Treaty mark the high water line of this effort. Canada certainly was present at the creation, and Ottawa mattered more in the years from 1947 to 1949 than it ever has before or since in peacetime. But Britain and Europe remained weak into the 1950s, the US grew ever stronger, and Canada, not for want of effort, essentially found itself left as the junior partner in a bipolar relationship. NATO had its moments in the next fifty years, but its members' performance in Former Yugoslavia, in Afghanistan, and now in Libya do not suggest that it can be relied on as a prop of Canadian foreign policy, let alone as a repository of a credible Grand Strategy. Few in Ottawa any longer believe in NATO as a military or political alliance of crucial relevance to us.

Sometimes, of course, small country national leaders may formulate an overarching policy – the functional principle, for example, that Canada derived during the Second World War in an effort to get itself a voice in Great Power decisions where it had the resources to matter, Secretary of State for External Affairs Louis St Laurent's 1947 Gray lecture that defined the principles of Canadian foreign policy, the Paul Martin government's International Policy Strategy, or the present government's Canada First strategy – to describe their intent, but these are at best small market policies aimed at protecting or advancing limited scope national interests. Copeland's definition seems to fit here.

But the leaders of every smaller nation know from hard experience that at base their interests may be sacrificed or overridden by superpowers following their own Grand Strategy or, sometimes, selfishly or in a fit of absence of mind advancing their own national interests. Britain historically had no qualms in sacrificing Canadian interests to advance its own. The United States, more shrewdly, has generally been reasonably accommodating of Canadian interests in the post-war years and it has let Canadian political and business leaders initially make the case for ever-closer ties.

A nation such as Canada has never gone to war in its own national interests, some might argue, including me, but only to advance or protect the interests of its colonial masters (Britain) or its allies (the United States). In other words, Canada – and many other nations, too – has always served the Grand Strategy of others.

This is the way of the world, and while we may grumble, there is little that can be done about this. Great powers think in grandiose terms and fight to protect their global interests; small powers are small and think small – or, at best, in medium size terms. Their aim, and here I come close to Pratt's minimalist definition of Grand Strategy, is to survive and prosper and to be left alone to do so, and a judicious use of their limited power, management of their alliances, and maximization of their resources to these ends is assuredly their best strategy.

In this vein, Senator Hugh Segal put it well a few years ago: "it is really vital that we develop a 'grand strategy for a small country' that integrates military, diplomatic, and foreign aid instruments in a thrust that preserves security and opportunity at home, advances leverage with our allies, and responds in an integrated way to the threats that are real from abroad. We need to shape a strategy that, as we learn from the experiences of East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti and Iraq, combines military, civil, private sector, democratizing, and post-conflict transition skills. These need to be built into real plans and models that maximize the ability of each to engage

constructively on Canada's behalf, and that enhance the leverage of a combined application where appropriate and helpful." This sounds very much as what we have now come to call a Whole of Government approach, and it is not yet something Canada has made work. We should.

But whatever else this is, it's not Grand Strategy as it has been traditionally understood. So for a country like Canada, the once-again popular refrain from "South Pacific" remains true: "What ain't we got? We ain't got..." not dimes which we do have, but a Grand Strategy which we cannot have.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Lawrence Granatstein was born in Toronto on 21 May 1939. He attended Toronto public schools, Le Collège militaire royal de St-Jean (Grad. Dipl., 1959), the Royal Military College, Kingston (B.A., 1961), the University of Toronto (M.A., 1962), and Duke University (Ph.D., 1966). He served in the Canadian Army (1956-66), then joined the History Department at York University, Toronto (1966-95) where, after taking early retirement, he is Distinguished Research Professor of History Emeritus. Granatstein has also taught at the University of Western Ontario and the Royal Military College. He was the Rowell Jackman Fellow at the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (1996-2000) and was a member of the Royal Military College of Canada Board of Governors (1997-2005). From 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2000, he was the Director and CEO of the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. He was then Special Adviser to the Director of the Museum (2000-01), a member of the Canadian War Museum Committee (2001-06), and chair of the Museum's Advisory Council (2001-06). He is now a member of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (2006-), a member of its Executive and Development Committees (2009-), and is chair of the Board's Canadian War Museum Advisory Committee (2007-). The government re-appointed him to the Board of Trustees for a second three-year term.

Granatstein has been an Officer of the Order of Canada since 1996. He held the Canada Council's Killam senior fellowship twice (1982-84, 1991-93), was the editor of the Canadian Historical Review (1981-84), and was a founder of the Organization for the History of Canada which gave him its first National History Award in 2006. He has been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 1982 and in 1992 was awarded the Society's J.B. Tyrrell Historical Gold Medal "for outstanding work in the history of Canada." His book, The Generals (1993), won the J.W. Dafoe Prize and the UBC Medal for Canadian Biography. Canada's National History Society named him the winner of the Pierre Berton Award for popular history (2004), and the Canadian Authors Association gave him its Lela Common Award for Canadian History in 2006. In 2008, the Conference of Defence Associations awarded him its 75th Anniversary Book Prize as "the author deemed to have made the most significant positive contribution to the general public's understanding of Canadian foreign policy, national security and defence during the past quarter century."

He has honorary doctorates from Memorial University of Newfoundland (1993), the University of Calgary (1994), Ryerson Polytechnic University (1999), the University of Western Ontario (2000), McMaster University (2000), Niagara University (2004), and the Royal Military College of Canada (2007). He is a senior Fellow of Massey College, Toronto (2000-). The Conference of Defence Associations Institute presented him the Vimy Award "for achievement and effort in the field of Canadian defence and security" (1996), and he was a Director of the CDAI and a member of its Executive Committee (2005-09). In 2007, he received the General Sir Arthur Currie Award from the Military Museums Society of Calgary, and he was named honorary historian of the Royal Canadian Military Institute.

In 1995 he served as one of three commissioners on the Special Commission on the Restructuring of the [Canadian Forces] Reserves (chaired by the Rt. Hon. Brian Dickson, former Chief Justice of Canada), and in 1997 he advised the Minister of National Defence on the future of the Canadian Forces. He was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Dominion Institute, is a national fellow of the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (1997-), is on the Research Advisory Board of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute (2010-), and was Chair of the Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century (2001-5) for which he wrote a monthly column (2006-07). He is a Senior Research Fellow

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Granatstein writes on 20th Century Canadian national history--the military, defence and foreign policy, Canadian-American relations, the public service, and politics. He comments regularly on historical questions, defence, and public affairs in the press and on radio and television; he provided the historical commentary for CBC-TV's coverage of the 50th, 60th, and 65th anniversaries of D-Day (1994, 2004, 2009), V-E Day (1995, 2005), V-J Day (1995), and the 90th anniversary of Vimy Ridge (2007); and he speaks frequently here and abroad. He has been a historical consultant on many films, including "Canada's War" (Yap Films, 2004), and he wrote for the National Film Board's projects to put Canadian Great and Second World War film footage on-line. He wrote a regular book review column for Legion magazine (2006-09) and for On Track (2006-08), and he was the historical consultant for the Ontario Veterans Memorial (2005-06) and the Gardiner Museum's Battle of Britain exhibit (2006).

Granatstein's many scholarly and popular books include The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada 1939-45 (1967, 1970), Peacekeeping: International Challenge and Canadian Response (1968), Canadian Foreign Policy Since 1945 (1969, 1970, 1973), Forum: Canadian Life and Letters 1920-1970 (1972), Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-45 (1975, 1990), Ties that Bind: Canadian-American Relations in Wartime (1975), Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada (1977, 1985), American Dollars/Canadian Prosperity (1978), A Man of Influence: Norman Robertson and Canadian Statecraft (1981), The Gouzenko Transcripts (1982), The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-57 (1982, 1998), Twentieth Century Canada (1983, 1986, 1989), Bloody Victory: Canadians and the D-Day Campaign (1984, 1994), The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin (1984), Sacred Trust: Brian Mulroney and the Conservative Party in Power (1985), Canada 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation (1986), The Collins Dictionary of Canadian History (1986), How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States (1989), Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War (1989), A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War (1989), Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy (1990, 1991) Spy Wars: Canada and Espionage from Gouzenko to Glasnost (1990, 1992), Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese in World War II (1990; Japanese ed., 1994), For Better or For Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s (1991, 1992, 2007), War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf--Canada's Limited Wars (1991), English Canada Speaks Out (1991), Dictionary of Canadian Military History (1992, 1994), The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War (1993, 1995, 2005), Empire to Umpire: Canadian Foreign Policy to the 1990s (1994; rev. ed., 2007), Victory 1945: Canadians from War to Peace (1995), The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II (1995), Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism (1996, 1997), Petrified Campus: Canada's Universities in Crisis (1997, 1998), The Canadian 100: The Hundred Most Influential Canadians of the Twentieth Century (1997, 1998), The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada (1998, 1999), Who Killed Canadian History? (1998, 1999, rev. ed., 2007), Trudeau's Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Pierre Trudeau (1998, 1999), Prime Ministers: Rating the Prime Ministers (1999, 2000), Our Century: The Canadian Journey (2000, 2001), Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace (2002, 2004), First Drafts: Eyewitness Accounts from Canada's Past (2003, 2004), Canada and the Two World Wars (2003), The Importance of Being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada's National Interests through Tighter Ties with the U.S. (2003), Who Killed the Canadian Military? (2004; paper ed., 2004, 2008), Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War (2004), Battle Lines: First Person

Military Accounts from Our Past (2004), The Last Good War: An Illustrated History of Canada in the Second World War, 1939-1945 (2005), The Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves, 1995: Ten Years Later (2005), The Land Newly Found: Eyewitness Accounts of the Canadian Immigration Experience (2006), Whose War Is It? How Canada Can Survive in the Post-9/11 World (2007, 2008), and A Threatened Future: Canada's Future Strategic Environment and Its Security Implications (2007). He is now preparing (with Dean Oliver) The Companion to Canadian Military History (Oxford University Press/Canadian War Museum, 2010).

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