

PANEL TWO: Multilateralism, Unilateralism, and Spheres of Influence

Panelist one: Stephen Brooks: America's Place in the World

When you're thinking about the United States place in the world there are two questions, the first, how powerful is the US in relation to other countries? Some people say that the United States is declining, this is not the case. At the end of the Cold War the United States emerged on top of a world with a unipolar system. The United States is an empire and now we are switching gears and it is being seen as a weary titan. Opinion has changed in this manner because of Iraq.

In response to Iraq people are realizing that if you have a lot of material power it does not always translate to results. The US does not always get what it wants but it has far more global power than any other state. The distribution of power has become skewed towards the US and in regards to military power the US spends far more than the rest of the world. The US economy is also twice the size of the nearest competitor, China. With the US so far ahead in both the military and economic realms, and the fact that no other country has been so far ahead in both areas, shows that the US is the sole superpower and because of this it may face great restraints on its power. These restraints will not be systemic.

The standard view is that the international system tightly constrains the United States, and that the US faces a looming balancing constraint as it oversteps itself, and if it is not cautious it will soon find itself in another cold war situation. This is not the case because it is so far ahead militarily and economically.

People make three mistakes when they write the United States off. First they focus on trend and ignore the reality of today: China and India are growing very rapidly and so they must be very powerful; they may be growing quickly but they are still way behind. We see trends today and extrapolate from that without taking into account what the world is now. We also should not confuse a state that is rising with one that has risen, and along with that we should not confuse a state that is declining from one that has declined because relative power shifts slowly.

Second people divide the power of nations into subcomponents rather than looking at total power. In the realm of foreign policy people do not say that the United States and the European Union are equals. If we did break down the power of nations into subcomponents then we would see that we have a bipolar world between the US and Japan. The key issue is how do states score overall.

Third people set overly high expectation of what the US can do. People think that the US can do whatever it wants, but the US is not omnipotent. After the world saw the US fail in Iraq they said that its reign as a unipolar power was over.

The second question to be asked about the United States place in the world is will the US work with other nations? The United States will decisively refrain from going it alone as

Bush followed the go it alone policy and it did not go very well; however, the US will be strongly tempted to go it alone in security affairs. Bush did not invent unilateralism. If you say the system is unipolar it is assumed that you must be in favour of the US going it alone, and this may be why some people are reluctant to label the system as unipolar. Going alone is almost always unwise, but it is not necessarily bad. When the US acts alone and good results follow other states sign on and it is called leadership, on the other hand if the US goes alone and it doesn't go well then it is called unilateralism. This process does not differ, it is the outcomes of policy that do, and criticism based on substance versus policy should be carefully examined.

With the US remaining the sole superpower and in the future being tempted to go it alone one policy is relevant: How can you temper the idea of going it alone? If the system can be changed and restructured so that it makes it more attractive to work with others, such as through a restructuring of existing institutions, or by creating new ones, in addition international security institutions also need upgrading. So why would we want to revise security issues? To better address problems that we're not talking about now. Canada as an ally needs to be on board for institutional change and this will be valued.

2nd Panelist: Robert Pastor: Ottawa's path to Washington Should Go Through Mexico: Why North America is the Answer to Canada's Chronic "US Problem"

The fundamental question for this conference is how to improve relations despite concerns. The fact is that the US feels positively about Canada, but goals are rarely reached. If a goal is reached then Canadians are left enraged and wondering whether it was worth it in the first place. The conclusion is that we have to be wary of the elephant. The path to Washington is to go through Mexico city first. The chances of advancing Canadian interests will be enhanced this way.

So what is wrong with the Canada US relationship? Canada and the United States have the largest trading relationship in the world, Canada is a member of NATO and Canada has great oil resources, but very few people in the United States know how important Canada is to the US. The US does not consult and it does not comply with agreements, and the US does not have a lot of respect for Canada's accomplishments. In addition Canadians have difficulty getting people to pay attention, such as when the Smart Border Agreement was ignored. It can certainly be argued that this is not the way to treat a close friend.

First, the United States is an international power and so issues all come to the US's front door and so only emergencies are responded to, or people who make the most noise, and that leaves very little time for Canadians. Second if US domestic issues line up they are addressed, for example no argues for compliance with NAFTA but sides with the US trucking industry.

What are Canada's goals? Canada would like to be in the room during crises such as the financial crisis which affects are being felt in Canada. Institutions can work together and there can be common approaches to the border, as well as a joint environmental policy. This is not a new agenda, so how do we accomplish it?

The first option is to work quietly and compete with Mexico to see who gets in the door first with the next president; however, the US is a young vibrant adolescent but also an aging war horse and so just asking for good relations will not lead very far. The second option is to go to Mexico and evaluate what the agenda is and you will find that every one of those items is on the Mexican agenda and so why don't you go to Washington together?

Many Canadians think that Mexican and Canadian interests are different. Canadians think that they have an excellent bilateral relationship with the US and that Mexico has a bad one, but this might not be true. Mexico is not nice to associate with because of drugs and immigration. It's true that Mexico has serious problems and because of this it gets attention, it may not be the attention it would like but it does get attention, and with Canada at the table it would be more positive attention.

20% of the Mexican population lives in the US. Immigrants, legal and otherwise, for the majority come from Mexico, as well there are a large number of Hispanic political figures. Canada could define a broader North American vision by talking with Mexico. This would also help to develop North American commissions that would help with education, infrastructure etc. Canada is one of the most generous nations in the world but never looks to Mexico to help them and if Canada helped Mexico, Mexico would help Canada get a seat at the table.

What are the best ways to achieve these goals? Canada must move towards a truly multilateral relationship, not just a bilateral relationship. Canada and Mexico must work together and come up with commissions and answers to problems and speak with the United States together. If this is not done the new president will not pay attention and work through an agenda. We must use a north American approach as we have exhausted all of our other resources.

3rd Panelist: Joel Sokolsky: Friendly Realism in Canada – US Security Relations at the end of the Bush Administration

We underestimate how well Canada deals with the United States and we overestimate our problems, and we underestimate how domestic politics plays in both countries. The Canadian option may well serve the interests of Canada and the United States. Fundamentally in Canada US relations are based on friendly realism, and Americans that have to deal with Canada on certain policy issues understand Canadian policy.

When we approach the US, Canadians are realists even though we pretend that we are not. The goal of Canadian policy is the prosperity and security of Canadians and so we like to say that we are multilateral, but we prefer the bilateral approach. The measure of

realism in how Canada approaches the United States has kept relations friendly as neither country is asked to surrender vital national interests and it is why we have fundamentally common values in our approach to world order. The issue may be in a discrepancy of power.

Canada US relations have been fundamentally successful. There may be problems in Canada US relations, but between the two countries these problems are expected. The European Union is not free of controversy either. Canada and the US have agreements where a measure of unilateral action is preserved and so they work together because the two countries address issues and cooperate. This is successful at the subnational level. The public wants this cooperation, but there are sensitivities on both sides with regards to sovereignty. Canadians tend to see the world through the prism of their relationship with the US and so disagreements loom on the Canadian agenda. When these disagreements arise there is a lot of play in Canada: the left is happy that they have gotten the attention of the US and the right is concerned over the state of the relationship.

In Canada the Canadian government has to speak to the US government and assure it that we are supportive and then face the Canadian public's nationalism. Given the nature of the issues on the bilateral agenda it would be difficult to find constituencies in the US to support the bilateral agenda of Canada. Grand ideas discount the domestic factors in both countries and when they are raised it affects the level of cooperation between the two countries. By and large Canada has, contrary to critics, been fairly supportive of the US. The security agenda for the US is global and the bilateral security agenda is not an issue. The problem is in overseas operations and in Canada supporting US objectives overseas.

Canadian and American governments have managed the post 9/11 situation relatively well. This can be seen as trade has remained strong and people are still secure. The border will always be there and we have to accept that as a reality. If you look at post 9/11 Canada – US relations you can see that they are closer than they have ever been before. This is the way forward, because, for both countries, realism in foreign policy at home and approaching Canada US relations without grand strategy will work better with domestic policies and be supported at home.

4th Panelist: Jonathan Paquin: In the Hard Sphere of US influence: How can Canada Reach a Balance Between Autonomy and North American Harmony?

Canada is a sovereign nation but every time the US makes a decision regarding North American security Canada realizes how little it can do. The relationship between The US and Canada is a precarious one: NORAD, the debate over the nuclearization of the Bomark missiles, intervention in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. So why is Canada at the heart of US influence and how can the stability be increased between Canada and the US?

Canada is the only state in the hardest sphere of US influence: Canada has been involved in the foreign strategy of the US and US domestic defence against terrorism. We have the smart border agreement and common immigration policies as well as sharing

immigration databases that have led to increased intelligence sharing. Canada has also played a role in the war in Afghanistan defensively and offensively. It is not in Canada's interest to neglect or deny that Canada is integrated with the US.

We still maintain control in this integration. The security of the continent and Canadian foreign policy are two separate things. Canada has been thought of as no longer sovereign by a few parties due to working with the US so closely. So does saying no to the US on foreign policy decisions hurt Canada?

Continentalists believe that Canada's relationship with the US should define policies. Canada could increase its influence by supporting Americans in order to influence what is going on, and we should put all of our eggs in the continental basket. The other side is that Canada must stand up for Canada and its values. Both these fields of thought are trying to find a balance between economic prosperity and nationalism and it would be wrong to put the balance here. The balance should be put between continentalism and internationalism. Both schools are not compatible if Canadian national interests and foreign policy realms are separate. There is a continental security realm and it is counterproductive to fight against this. It should be institutionalized as this will allow us to downplay an asymmetrical relationship with the United States. Canada's contribution should be limited to measures pertaining to security, but we should not extend the perimeters that are indirectly related to security such as clean water.

In the foreign policy realm Canada should not give in to a blind bilateral approach or total nationalism. Canada did not influence US strategy in Afghanistan, and since 2001 Canada has said that it would be willing to participate if the UN signed off on the mission. This shows that Canada has been suggesting since 2001 that its interests in the war on terrorism lie in the process and not the outcomes. The case of the NATO intervention in Serbia shows a contradiction as the Security Council did not sign off on that mission. The importance of the North Atlantic consensus shows why Canada is involved in some missions and not in Iraq, with a North American system Canada would be better.

If Canada were to focus on North Atlanticism the actions of Canada would not be as confusing. It would also reduce the asymmetrical relationship because the United States influence would be diluted. Lastly by becoming the champion of North Atlanticism it may play a mediating role between the US and the European nations. There is an interconnect between politics and geography and so we need a balance between North Atlanticism and Continentalism. Since 2001 Canada has known where the US stands with regards to security policy but they do not know where Canada stands.