

A MATURE EXERCISE OF SOVEREIGNTY[©]

BY L. YVES FORTIER, C.C., Q.C.*

I.	INTRODUCTION	425
II.	CANADA'S DEPLOYMENT IN AFGHANISTAN	427
III.	WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE	430
IV.	THOSE DAMN YANKEES	431
V.	BACK TO THE FUTURE	435
VI.	CONCLUSION	437

I. INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of this century, it is quite evident that, in many respects, the challenges facing our country are identical to those confronted by our predecessors; in fact, they are identical to those that have existed throughout our history. While the events of 11 September 2001 have certainly brought these issues into sharper focus, the challenges to which I refer are no more acute today than at other moments in our history.

I am referring to the challenges of defining ourselves as a nation and Canada as a sovereign state. Who are we and who are we not? What do we stand for and what do we oppose? Who are our friends, our allies, and our adversaries? Where does our country fit in the community of nations? What useful role can we play on the world stage?

I hesitate in purporting to address such traditional Canadian conundrums, lest I be taken for some sort of self-professed shaman, dispensing answers to questions that have bedevilled Canadians for centuries. But nothing could be further from the truth.

However, if I do, at times, sound certain of my opinions, I hope to be excused if my remarks contain at least a certain element of "been there, done that." As I address you today, in Toronto, unarguably the seat of economic power in Canada and to many Québécois the centre of what they inaccurately

[©] 2002, L. Yves Fortier.

* Chairman of Ogilvy Renault. Canada's former Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and President of the U.N. Security Council. This is a revised version of the fourth Pierre Genest Memorial Lecture delivered at Osgoode Hall Law School on 23 January 2002. The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of his associate, Stephen L. Drymer, in the preparation of this lecture.

consider a monolithic “rest of Canada” (ROC), I have a secret to tell you: the struggle that Canada is once again experiencing—the struggle to define and assert its identity and distinctiveness in an ever-converging world—is a struggle that Québec, I am pleased to say, has won. Although this may be welcome news to many, it is not really a secret. The real secret is *how* this occurred, and this is the matter which I propose to address today since I believe that it holds lessons of utility to all Canadians.

In truth, the explanation is quite elementary. The answer was there all along. Simply put, the realization gradually dawned on Québécois that Québec’s age-old struggle was, for the most part (at least since the Quiet Revolution), *of our own making*. The consequence was that, some time during the last decade, we simply decided to rid ourselves of this self-imposed yoke. Whereas Québec traditionally defined itself as what it was *not*—not English-speaking, not Protestant, not wealthy; in two words: not Canada—it came to consider its distinctiveness as self-evident and to view its identity in terms of its positive attributes, befitting a modern, open, and sophisticated society.

Even today, it is no coincidence that the old and tired purveyors of separatism in Québec continue to harp on what they contend Québec is not—essentially, “not the ROC”—in order to peddle their snake oil. The vast majority of Québécois, however, could hardly care less. They no longer seek self-worth by staring out the window at the rest of the world; they find it by looking in the mirror and seeing who they are and what they have achieved. Interestingly, as Québec has matured as a society, Québécois have lost the need to insist on their “difference.” They no longer view separation—the ultimate political statement of “what we are not”—as an element of self-expression and autonomy.

It is from this perspective that I have recently pondered the curious issue of Canadian sovereignty; curious in that it is an issue at all, let alone one which has resurfaced with such force since 11 September 2001. Why is it, for example, that Québec, especially the so-called sovereigntists, can unequivocally embrace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), while many inhabitants of the large and powerful ROC continue to have doubts regarding what they see as the loss of sovereignty inherent in such international arrangements? Why is it that so many Canadians imagine threats to our sovereignty lurking behind so many corners? What is it about our sense of self, in particular *vis-à-vis* the United States, that prompts such reactions and that has brought the issue of “continentalism”¹ to the forefront of national debate?

II. CANADA’S DEPLOYMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

¹ By “continentalism” I mean, broadly speaking, the harmonization of policies between Canada and the United States.

One recent example of what I have chosen to call the continentalist debate was then Defence Minister Art Eggleton's January 2002 announcement of Canada's decision to send 750 ground troops to assist the U.S. effort to root out and destroy the remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in the southern areas of Afghanistan.² For several weeks prior, the Canadian government had been considering the deployment of our troops in a more traditional peacekeeping role under the leadership of the United Nations.³ This is the sort of role that Canada has relished typically; a role that I and many others would attribute as having been practically invented by Lester Pearson at the time of the Suez crisis⁴ and that has brought our country both admiration and respect within the international community.

Two factors appear to have determined the matter. Minister Eggleton said that "European politics" effectively left little room for a meaningful Canadian presence among the seventeen countries committed to the U.N. operation being coordinated by the British.⁵ More importantly, and of more lasting significance I would argue, was Canada's desire to play, and to be perceived as playing, a more direct military role in Afghanistan. In the circumstances, the government decided that, given a choice between a minor role in a multilateral U.N. operation and a more robust combat contribution to the U.S. war effort, Canada's interests were better served by working with the Americans. This decision put meat on the bones of the Prime Minister's declaration, six days after the September 11 attacks, that "we are at war against terrorism."⁶

² Daniel Leblanc & Jill Mahoney, "Canada Opts for Combat Role" *The Globe and Mail* (8 January 2002) A1. In March, the Defence Minister announced that 130 additional soldiers would be deployed to the region; see "Canada to Send More Ground Troops to Afghanistan," online: D-Net <http://www.dnd.ca/eng/archive/2002/mar02/01groundtroops_n_e.htm>. However, the Defence Minister announced, on 21 May 2002, that the 850 soldiers sent to Afghanistan would be returning in late July and that Canada would not be sending replacement troops. See e.g. Robert Fife, "Princess Pats to Return in Summer" *The National Post* (22 May 2002) A1; Jeff Sallot, "Ottawa Takes Fire for Ending Mission" *The Globe and Mail* (22 May 2002) A1; and "3 PPCLI Troops Coming Home This Summer," online: D-Net <http://www.dnd.ca/menu/feature_story/2002/may02/29may02_f_e.htm>.

³ Shawn McCarthy, "Pulled Ever Deeper into U.S. Orbit" *The Globe and Mail* (8 January 2002) A6.

⁴ See generally John Robinson Beal, *The Pearson Phenomenon* (Toronto: Longmans Canada, 1964) c. 8; Norman Hillmer, ed., *Pearson: The Unlikely Gladiator* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) at 26-27, 162; Geoffrey A.H. Pearson, *Seize the Day: Lester B. Pearson and Crisis Diplomacy* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993) c. 9-10; and John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1992) c. 4.

⁵ Leblanc & Mahoney, *supra* note 2 at A1.

⁶ *House of Commons Debates*, 79 (17 September 2001) (Right Hon. J. Chrétien), online: Parliament of Canada Homepage <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/1/parlbus/chambus/house/debates/079_2001-09-17/toc079-E.htm>.

The import of Canada's decision was immediately noted by both supporters and critics. For the first time, Canadian ground forces would be operating under unilateral U.S. operational control—that is, under the U.S. flag but without the support of the U.N. or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)⁷—although the U.S. action was sanctioned as self-defence by the U.N. Security Council shortly after September 11.⁸ Canadians had previously operated under American command, on land, at sea, and in the air; however, Canada's ground forces had never done so on a direct bilateral basis. All previous Canadian deployments of ground forces, either alongside Americans or under American command, had occurred within the context of NATO operations, such as in the Balkan conflicts, or as part of a multilateral coalition formed for specific purposes, such as the 1991 Gulf War.⁹ Even during the Korean War, the U.N. flag flew over the anticommunist alliance of which Canada was a member. In short, this was the first time in our history as a fully sovereign nation that Canadian ground forces would gird for battle under the banner of the United States or, I believe, under the flag of any state other than Canada. As political and military observers remarked, Canada's decision to send its army where its navy and airforce had gone before was especially significant because, despite the sophistication of military hardware, "ground troops remain the essential element in warfare, and because the army is by far the Canadian Forces' largest branch."¹⁰

Notwithstanding the groundbreaking nature of the government's decision, the deployment of Canada's army harked back to what has been referred to as "an honourable Canadian tradition."¹¹ In fact, it resurrected a dilemma at least a century old. I will return to this historical context since I believe that it is only by attempting to understand current events through a historical lens that we can learn from history rather than blindly repeat it. However, I will first consider the primary argument articulated by opponents of Canada's decision to deploy its troops in Afghanistan.

The principal concern, as I understand it, was that the ramifications of the government's decision extended far beyond the battlefield and effectively put Canadian sovereignty at risk. The point was well and succinctly made by Canada's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, on the same day

⁷ Leblanc & Mahoney, *supra* note 2 at A6.

⁸ "Security Council Condemns, 'In Strongest Terms', Terrorist Attacks On United States," online: United Nations Homepage <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2001/SC7143.doc.htm>>.

⁹ Barry Cooper & David Bercuson, "Finding Our Place in the U.S. Orbit" *The National Post* (9 January 2002) A14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

that the troop deployment decision was announced. In remarks widely published in the media, Mr. Axworthy condemned the decision as “regrettable” and suggested that Canada was increasingly “spinning firmly in the U.S. orbit.”¹² He believed that this would undermine our country’s role as an “independent operator.”¹³ Referring more broadly to what he considered the ill-fated effort to harmonize Canada’s security policies with those of the United States in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Mr. Axworthy stated, “The only test is how high we jump.”¹⁴

In pith and substance, this concern lies at the heart of the debate regarding what I previously referred to as continentalism in all its many and varied manifestations.

I cannot, in good conscience, end this brief discussion of the issues raised by Canada’s deployment in Afghanistan without referring to the views on the subject expressed by retired Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, another eminent Canadian. I consider Major-General MacKenzie’s observations particularly relevant because, whether or not they are accurate, and whether or not they are shared by all Canadians, they too reflect and can be said to represent the views of many in this country.

General MacKenzie applauded the government’s decision. In typical, engaging fashion, he said that joint operations with the United States in and around Kandahar would be more meaningful than—in his words—“directing traffic in Kabul” under the U.N. flag.¹⁵ I believe it is significant that this conclusion (though it was likely framed in different language), was clearly shared by Canada’s current military leaders. Indeed, the decision to engage in a joint operation with the United States, with a full battalion deployed as an intact unit under Canadian command but overall U.S. operational control, appears not only to have been a political decision but was favoured as well by senior military commanders, most importantly, General Ray Hénault, Chief of Canada’s Armed Forces.¹⁶

III. WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE

Since, as Shakespeare tells us, “what’s past is prologue,”¹⁷ Canadians would be remiss if, in the context of the current debate on continentalism, we

¹² McCarthy, *supra* note 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Leblanc & Mahoney, *supra* note 2 at A6.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* at II, i, 247.

did not consider previous incarnations of the issue.

That continentalism has become a hot-button issue is undeniable, and was likely unavoidable in the aftermath of September 11. When the then Leader of the Opposition, Stockwell Day, opened Parliament's question period on 3 October 2001 saying: "It is now day 22," his audience knew what he meant. "Day 22" obviously meant twenty-two days after September 11.¹⁸ Indeed, in many respects, our current national debates concerning a wide range of both domestic and international issues date from, and are conditioned by, that horrific day. In fact, however, many of the issues with which we currently grapple have existed since the beginning of "this experiment called Canada."¹⁹ Through the National Energy Program in the early 1980s, cruise missile testing in the mid-1980s, and two rounds of free trade in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concerns regarding the twin issues of continentalism and Canadian sovereignty have ruled the day.

History even sheds light, and offers perhaps a lesson or two, on the current deployment of Canadian forces in Afghanistan: "One hundred years ago, Canadian troops, including the Strathconas, elements of which are today in Afghanistan, were fighting beside British troops and under British command during the Boer War."²⁰ As scholars Barry Cooper and David Bercuson have written, Canadians took part in that military initiative because the government of the day, under Wilfrid Laurier, was intent on increasing Canada's influence within the British empire.²¹ At the time, Great Britain was "the sun around which Canada revolved," though there was considerable uncertainty expressed in this country regarding "how far from that sun [Canada] should orbit."²² Substitute "the United States" for "Great Britain" and, in a nutshell, you have the dilemma facing Canada today.

The great debate regarding Canadian sovereignty during the first third of the twentieth century reflected two contrary points of view, one of which was reflected in Laurier's policies. He and his Tory successor, Robert Borden, maintained that Canada would gain autonomy and influence as a nation through full and active participation in Imperial affairs; indeed, Borden is credited with ensuring "a significant Canadian presence at the post-World War I peace table as a result of this country's contributions and sacrifices on the Western front

¹⁸ *House of Commons Debates*, 91 (3 October 2001) (S. Day), online: Parliament of Canada Homepage <http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/1/parlbus/chambus/house/debates/091_2001-10-03/toc091-E.htm>.

¹⁹ Roy MacGregor, "Continentalism is Back" *The National Post* (4 October 2001) A6.

²⁰ Cooper & Bercuson, *supra* note 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

during that conflict.”²³ Another policy which was effective, as the Statute of Westminster eloquently testifies, was the “opposing viewpoint, championed by William Lyon Mackenzie King, [which] held that Canada could only gain the autonomy it sought by keeping its distance from Britain and especially from Imperial defence planning.”²⁴

It should be acknowledged that these contradictory policies, each of which was successful in its day, were of course products of two radically divergent sets of circumstances: war and peace. Clearly, each was appropriate to the particular context within which it arose.

The power of the United States today is arguably even greater than that of Great Britain a century ago, but the dilemma for Canada remains largely as it was then.²⁵ Although the centre of our solar system may have shifted, the question remains as to “the optimal radius of the Canadian orbit around the [new] American sun.”²⁶ Canada’s actions in response to the shameful attacks of September 11, and the collective soul-searching engendered both by the attacks and by our government’s reaction, poignantly illustrate the durability and complexity of this dilemma.

IV. THOSE DAMN YANKEES

It occurs to me, not for the first time, that Canadians are uniquely prone to identity crises. Perhaps alone among the peoples of the world, it sometimes seems as though we are never happier than in the throes of debate concerning our sovereignty, our unity, our values: in a word, our *identity*, especially as it relates to the United States.

Indeed, the United States exerts a strong and unavoidable pull, and Canadians of all stripes are well aware of this.²⁷ Interestingly, they appear less frightened by the idea of a closer relationship with our southern neighbour than many politicians within the current and previous Liberal governments: “Over the past five years, the government has floated a number of ideas, including a common currency, a customs union, even water sales and common energy policy.”²⁸ In almost every instance, however, the mere utterance of such continentalist ideas was followed by qualification, denial, and inevitably, little

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

or no meaningful change.²⁹

I would like to clarify that I am not here today to advocate such change. Nor do I believe that continentalist policies—policies harmonized with those of the United States—are required or appropriate in all cases. What I do deplore is the almost reflexive gnashing of teeth and rending of garments that often follow the merest suggestion of closer links with our American cousins. Why? Because such reactions serve only to stifle debate regarding the very matters which the so-called Canadian nationalists, self-titled defenders of our country, purport to defend; that is, our identity as Canadians, and the values and policies that we espouse.

Anti-Americanism only clouds the issues that its proponents claim to resolve. Poll after poll demonstrates that “Canadians have no desire to become Americans, and Americans certainly have no aspirations to digest Canada.”³⁰ As Stephen Handelman pointed out in a recent article, Canada’s immigration policy may be shifting to meet American post-September 11 concerns. However, even U.S. officials acknowledge that “no one is talking about erasing the border or setting up a customs union. For a very good reason: the U.S. is wary of [an] erosion of sovereignty, too.”³¹ That observation is extremely insightful and, I submit, particularly well worth bearing in mind at this time of heightened sensitivity to the issue of relations with the United States. The fact is that we are not alone in our desire to preserve our sovereignty. This simple fact itself suggests that we have less to fear from our southern neighbour than many people imagine.

Historians Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer recently addressed the question: “Why does rabid anti-Americanism stir some Canadians so deeply?”³² Their article was a timely response to the view—to my mind, obscene—expressed by some people in Canada, to the effect that the events of September 11 should be seen as just punishment, or at least foreseeable retribution, for U.S. actions abroad. Granatstein and Hillmer noted that what they call the “hardy perennial of Canadian anti-Americanism” returned in full flower this past September, even as Americans were grieving their losses.³³

Granatstein and Hillmer’s conclusion, with which I strongly agree, was that, “[a]t its best, anti-Americanism is a defence mechanism for Canadians who want to remain independent in an integrated North America. At its worst, it is

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Stephen Handelman, “A Mighty Fine Line” *Time* 158:21 (12 November 2001) 27.

³² Jack L. Granatstein & Norman Hillmer, “Those Damn Yankees” *Maclean’s* 114:43 (22 October 2001) 58 at 58.

³³ *Ibid.* at 59.

bias and prejudice, fuelled by envy, hatred, and a naïve view of the world.”³⁴ I would add that, in my opinion, anti-Americanism is but a reflection of what I have called our propensity for identity crises. To be fair, it may only be natural both that the question “who are we?” and the temptation to answer that question by loudly proclaiming “who are we not” should arise with some frequency given our proximity and ties to the United States. However, in the final analysis, the task of defining ourselves and our country is ours alone. We must look inward to answer the question “who are we?” for that is the essence of autonomy. Similarities with the United States are not a threat to that autonomy, but part of who we are. Being different from the Americans (or anyone else) is in no way an affirmation of sovereignty. Ultimately, “[d]oing what is right by us” is a mature exercise of sovereignty.³⁵

Most Canadians are in fact at peace with their southern cousins. They live contentedly as a part of North America. If we seem at times consumed by a struggle to remain distinct from the United States, it is only because “our similarities greatly outweigh our differences, starting with our common embrace of such values as freedom, tolerance, democracy, and order.”³⁶ From September 11 to the present day, polls have demonstrated that most Canadians support the United States in its war against terrorism;³⁷ they should, because it is our common values of “pluralism, secularism, and democracy that are under attack.”³⁸ Canada is as threatened by terrorism as the United States, and is equally threatened by the social, political, and economic instability that terrorism, if unchecked, can cause.

I would go further. Permit me to share with you some of the emotions I experienced on 11 September 2001 and during the days which followed. Of horror I need not speak; all of us, I know, experienced the same emotion. Horror with respect to the depravity of the individuals responsible, the scope of the disaster and the scale of human life taken. “There but for the grace of God go I” is a thought that perhaps also occurred to many people and I believe that that realization is important, both for individuals and for states not directly targeted by the perpetrators of the attacks. However, more fundamentally, I could not but feel on September 11 that the souls who perished on that day did so, in part, for me. They did so because they were—but by no means exclusively—Americans. They were targeted for no other reason than that they were citizens of a nation

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Edward Greenspon, “Debunking the Myths About Post-Sept. 11 Canada” *The Globe and Mail* (2 October 2001) A17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Granatstein & Hillmer, *supra* note 32 at 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

envied and despised by the attackers. A nation whose founding principles most of us cherish for ourselves. A nation whose power and might—economic, technological, and military—is essential to maintaining the existence that much of the world, including ourselves, lives on a daily basis.

It occurred to me on September 11 that we owe, to some degree, quite a bit to the United States. This includes the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, the maintenance of stability in various regions of the globe, the economy in which many of our goods and services are sold, and even the overwhelming military force under whose umbrella we have long been sheltered, enabling us to direct governmental and societal priorities and spending elsewhere. Did we ever believe that these boons to our well-being were truly of our own making exclusively, or that they were the product of natural forces independent of human intervention? Did we ever believe that our prosperity was cost- or risk-free? What are those costs? How are they allocated among the beneficiaries—including ourselves—of peace, prosperity, and growth? Do we fully realize that, though we are different, though we are not Americans, though our values and policies are not identical, we too, among other nations, rely upon and benefit from many of the policies and actions of the United States, including certain of the very policies and actions stated by the September 11 terrorists as the reasons for their attacks? It is no coincidence that the target of the attacks was not the headquarters of the Department of National Defence in Ottawa, nor the Kremlin or the Forbidden City, nor even the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, but rather the symbols of American military and economic supremacy.

Questions such as these arose and swirled within my mind on September 11, even as the horror of the attacks were felt in my gut. While the answers remain inchoate intellectually, I could not and cannot escape the feeling that, in some measure, the victims of September 11 were targeted precisely because they represented a system of beliefs, values, finance, industry, politics, and economics that underlies our existence as Canadians today.

In *Faust*, Goethe wrote: “Freedom and existence are earned by those alone who conquer them each day anew.”³⁹ The events of 11 September 2001 have caused us to re-examine our freedom and existence, and have challenged us to conquer them anew. Broadly speaking, the challenge is twofold. On the one hand, we are challenged actively to participate in the defence, by force if necessary, of the freedom and existence that we have chosen for ourselves. At the same time, it is equally necessary for us to consider whether other proactive measures are appropriate to further that freedom and existence.

In my opinion, the decision to send our troops into battle alongside

³⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Doubleday, 1961) at II, V, 11575-76.

Americans and under American control is an example of the first of these challenges successfully, if belatedly, met. Far from constituting a sacrifice of sovereignty, it demonstrates a mature and clear-sighted appreciation of how we can best assist an operation that is fundamentally in our interest. As a Canadian, I am not ashamed to defend a friend, and I am certainly not ashamed to assist a friend whose actions, even if imperfect, benefit my fellow citizens.

It is the second of the broad challenges which I have identified that is, curiously, the more daunting; that is, a consideration of the many issues that arise under the rubric of continentalism. As I have attempted to demonstrate, these questions did not arise for the first time on 11 September 2001 but there is no doubt that they have come into sharper focus since.

V. BACK TO THE FUTURE

What are the issues of the day? Almost every media outlet reveals the same concerns—security, immigration, economic integration, our currency—to name but a few. In other words, the meat and potatoes of the continentalist debate. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

I believe that the issue of continentalism will come to be seen as the defining issue of this government, and likely the next several. It lies at the heart of both security and prosperity, two perennial concerns generally recognized as involving transnational, in particular American, factors. Yet, as has been pointed out recently, it also affects a range of secondary issues “from handguns to health care.”⁴⁰

It is impossible to foresee precisely what directions Canada will choose to take in respect of all of the issues raised by this age-old debate. However, the reality is that Canada has always been involved in a “necessary dance”⁴¹ with America, which must be clearly and broadly acknowledged if we intend to do more than merely follow the United States’ lead. This reality is nothing new. What is perhaps unique is the mood of most Canadians since September 11 and the profound sentiment—in many circles, warmth and compassion—toward our lifelong “dance partner.” This mood must be acknowledged, understood, and channelled by our government, to productive end. This, I believe, is the great challenge facing us at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Our current government continues to enjoy unprecedented support from the citizens of this country. In my opinion, since there is little risk of seeing power wrested from the Liberal Party, this government and this prime minister have a golden opportunity to engage Canadians in a forthright discussion, to facilitate a debate

⁴⁰ MacGregor, *supra* note 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

that transcends purely political rhetoric, and to spell out with boldness and creativity a vision of the Canada-U.S. relationship.

Clearly I am not alone in this opinion. On 10 January 2002, it was announced that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade was preparing to begin hearings regarding “the future of Canada-U.S. relations that will review everything from adopting the U.S. dollar to the unified customs regime. ... The hearings will see the first comprehensive parliamentary scrutiny of the issue of North American economic integration since Jean Chrétien came to power in 1993.”⁴² It remains to be seen whether this committee will in fact become a forum for discussion of such critical issues, let alone result in a meaningful report to which the government will respond with concrete measures.⁴³ Its unofficial agenda is nothing if not ambitious. It includes “dollarization” and economic integration more generally, as well as what its former Chairman Bill Graham (now Minister of Foreign Affairs) calls the “institutional framework” of our relationship with the United States and the need to move beyond what he sees as the “ad hoc basis” on which the relationship is managed.⁴⁴ I say: from the chairman’s mouth to the prime minister’s ears. Whatever the outcome, I heartily applaud the fundamental objective articulated by Mr. Graham: to “enable a debate.”⁴⁵

John Manley, currently Minister of Finance, emphasized early on during his tenure as Foreign Affairs Minister that he views the United States as Canada’s most important partner at many levels. That view was reiterated in December 2001: “We often in Canada focus on our differences with the United States. Those differences are far less significant than the similarities we have in values and objectives and respect for human rights and basic freedoms. We’re usually on the same side of global issues.”⁴⁶

On the question of continental defence, specifically the potential expansion of the Northern American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), and on the question of sovereignty that arises in any such joint security initiative, Mr. Manley stated: “We don’t see it as a cessation of sovereignty. We

⁴² Ian Jack, “MPs Forcing PM’s Hand on Dollar” *The National Post* (10 January 2002) A1.

⁴³ The Committee’s final report on the North American Relations study will be tabled in autumn 2002. See “North American Relationship Study,” online: House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade Homepage <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoCom/CommitteeMain.asp?Language=E&CommitteeID=143&Joint=0>>.

⁴⁴ Jack, *supra* note 42, at A6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* at A1.

⁴⁶ Mike Tricky, “Canadians Get More Credit Than We Merit: Manley” *The [Montreal] Gazette* (26 December 2001) A8.

see it as joint sovereignty operating in a functional way, in a desirable way.”⁴⁷ In my mind, that is the essence of a mature exercise of sovereignty. Sharing resources. Pooling sovereignty. And doing so because we have determined that it is best for us to do so. What is any treaty or multilateral convention but a partial compromise of otherwise unfettered autonomy? What is any multilateral organization but a pooling of resources or sovereignty? I submit that the crux of the issue is less the lofty issue of sovereignty *per se* than the more mundane matter of which “dance partner” to choose. To my mind, rather than bemoan our fate as neighbour, special friend, and ally of the United States, we should attempt to acknowledge honestly both the rewards and the challenges of the relationship.

VI. CONCLUSION

If Québécois have discovered, as I submit they have, that their distinctiveness is a given and that their identity lies not in *who they are not* but in *who they are*, there is surely no reason why Canada should do no less. We can deal with Americans in the same way we deal with Russians, Chinese, Angolans, and Indians—as equals, without feeling threatened. We can enact policies that make sense for us, without feeling threatened by a loss of sovereignty. The United States does not wish to colonize us any more than we wish to be colonized. We can acknowledge that our fears are often of our own creation without losing sight of what makes us Canadian. We can recognize similarities, and act on them in concert with the United States and other nations, without succumbing to guilt-racked soul-searching. We can be who we are without constantly questioning ourselves.

We are a noble nation, born in peace, forged in war, and the envy of much of the world. If we begin to realize just how true this is and cease demonizing the United States, we will finally merit fully the reputation and the laurels that we have struggled so hard to attain and that have been bestowed upon us. We can learn from the experience of “*les québécois canadiens*”: it is indeed possible to define ourselves, recognize our identity, preserve our autonomy, and assert our sovereignty, both on this continent and others, even as we acknowledge and strengthen the ties that bind us to countries which hold dear the values that we call our own.

In his “Speech on Conciliation with America” on 22 March 1775, the great English political thinker Edmund Burke declared: “Abstract Liberty, like

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

other mere abstractions, is not to be found.”⁴⁸ The lesson remains important today. The principles that define us mean nothing in the abstract: what counts is the manner in which they are exercised. Specifically, it is the exercise of sovereignty which renders the concept meaningful. And it is a mature exercise of sovereignty which characterizes a modern, self-assured nation.

It is time for Canadians to start looking in the mirror, rather than out the window, to know who we are. There is no need for us to demonize others, and no need to extol differences or fear similarities, as a basis of self-definition. There is no need to guard with obsessive jealousy what is indubitably and permanently ours: our identity and our sovereignty. As a mature nation, it behooves us to conduct ourselves accordingly: to acknowledge both the similarities and differences between us and our neighbours; to embrace rather than eschew alliances—be they military, economic, or political—which further our own goals; to stand confidently, not timidly, beside our friends in their time of need; and to recognize that we do so precisely because Canada is an autonomous, sovereign nation that acts in accordance with its fundamental values.

⁴⁸ Paul Langford, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) at 120.