

The Foreign Policy of Brian Mulroney, 1984-1993

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Our membership in multilateral institutions gets us no leverage and no particular place at the table. Our membership has to be personified in a way where other countries with the economic power to have an impact on our quality of life want to deal with Canada...¹

When Brian Mulroney became Prime Minister in 1984, he came to power with two mandates, both of which would dominate and largely define his term in office. The first was to revise Trudeau's Constitution Act of 1982 so as to obtain Quebec's signature, and the second was to realign Canadian foreign policy towards the United States. The latter objective is mostly associated with Mulroney's attempts to secure a bilateral free trade agreement with the United States, and is often perceived as a period when Canada largely abandoned the idea Pearsonian internationalism that had dominated Canadian foreign policy during the previous two decades. This paper, however, will attempt demonstrate that Mulroney's foreign policy was far more multi-lateral than is often understood. Its purpose is twofold. First, it will examine Mulroney's attempts to achieve a more harmonious relationship with the United States, which was achieved toning down Ottawa's criticisms of Washington's policies, but also by establishing close personal relationships with three separate Presidents of the United States. Second, it will examine Mulroney's international initiatives, from his opposition to apartheid rule in South Africa to his commitments to UN and NATO peacekeeping and military operations. It will stress, above all, that Mulroney always saw close relations with the United States, and in particular the American president, as a perquisite for Canada to play a leading role on the world stage, rather than as a hindrance.

It should be noted, however, that though this is a study of Mulroney's foreign policy in its entirety, this paper will not focus on the Open Skies Conference or Canada's relationship to NATO, which will be covered separately in greater detail in subsequent chapters. In the course of our research, we endeavored to interview as many politicians, diplomats, and former military personal in order to get their personal insight and analysis on the events in question. However, we were unable to interview either Joe Clark, Canada's Minister for External Affairs during the Mulroney administration, or with the

¹ Paul Heinbecker, *Getting Back in the Game: A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011), 74, cited in Brian Mulroney, *Memoirs: 1939-1993* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007).

former prime minister. As such, a certain degree of care must be taken when drawing conclusions from our interviewees, some of whom had greater access to the Prime Minister than others, and whose views may therefore reflect their own personal biases on the policies of the Mulroney administration, and not necessarily reflect their actual intention. In particular, we must take care when concluding what Mulroney's personal foreign policy objectives were or his views on a given event or person. Though we have his memoirs, which are extensive, they have been edited with care in order to portray events in the best possible light.

In opposition, Brian Mulroney had criticized the liberal governments of Pierre Trudeau and John Turner for neglecting Canada's partnerships and alliances with not only the United States, but also with the United Kingdom, France and Israel.² He also criticized the liberals for being insufficiently hostile towards the Soviet Union.³ Mulroney called for "super relations" with the United States, to redevelop a "special relationship" with them and promised to give the United States in turn the "benefit of the doubt."⁴ As we shall see however, upon becoming Prime Minister, Mulroney was to adopt a far more pragmatic approach to foreign affairs. Paul Heinbecker, one of our interviewees, declared in his book that Mulroney was "the last Prime Minister who came to office with international ambitions for Canada that matched the country's potential."⁵ Mulroney also was determined to play a far more active role in the formation of foreign policy, as is evidenced by his by the increased prominence of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) at the expense of the Department of External Affairs. For example, the total number of advisors was increased to 144, compared to 90 during the Trudeau administration, of which 13 were employed directly by the PMO (compared to only three during Trudeau's premiership).⁶

All of our interviewees agreed that Mulroney had initiated a fundamental realignment of Canadian foreign policy towards the United States. They disagreed, however, about the extent to which Mulroney focused on relations with the United States at the expense of the rest of the world as well as the extent to which Canadian foreign policy was curtailed by the necessity of maintaining amiable ties with the United States. Brian Mulroney's appointments when he came to power give us some insight into how he intended and would conduct foreign policy during his terms in office. One of the most striking aspects is that

² Kim Richard Nossal, "The PM and SSEA in Canada's Foreign Policy: Dividing the Territory, 1968-1994," *International Journal* 50/1 (1994/1995): 201.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Heinbecker, 75-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶ Nicholas Gammer, *From Peacekeeping to Peace Making: Canada's Response to the Yugoslav Crisis* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 171.

the vast majority of the key positions were filled by moderates, either within or outside the conservative party, such as Joe Clark as Minister for Foreign Affairs.⁷ He also appointed Stephen Lewis, a well-known social democrat, to be Canada's ambassador to the United Nations.⁸ Mulroney's response to the Ethiopian famine is also telling. The growing crisis in Ethiopia presented Mulroney with his first major foreign policy challenge. As public awareness of the crisis increased, his administration moved quickly to set up an initial relief fund of 50 million.⁹ However, this money was distributed not through the existing foreign aid organizations (such as the Canadian International Development Agency) but rather through a new agency, whose activities were coordinated by David McDonald who was appointed Canada's emergency coordinator of the African famine.¹⁰ In addition, the government actively encouraged an awareness campaign in order to encourage individuals, organizations, and companies to donate to the famine relief fund, through a pledge to match all donations up to 15 million, though this figure was subsequently increased to 36 million.¹¹ The relief program demonstrated a great degree of innovation in terms of international relief, as well as demonstrated the Mulroney administration's determination to honour its existing overseas commitments even at the beginning of his administration.

Blaikie, for his part, epitomizes the left's critique of Mulroney's realignment of Canada's foreign policy. In our interview with him, he lamented how "after 1984 you've got conservative governments that are going out of their way to be in line with the Americans on so many things. Making a virtue out of it."¹² While giving Mulroney credit for his policies towards South Africa, Blaikie nevertheless faults the conservative administration for its lethargy, indeed, its unwillingness to "get themselves into a position where they had to advocate for something that wasn't going to happen."¹³ Yet, as Paul Heinbecker emphasized, Mulroney did not always acquiesce to American foreign policy, noting that he disagreed strongly with Reagan's Star Wars project, abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and American relations with Cuba.¹⁴ However, these

⁷ Raymond Blake, *Transforming the Nation: Canada and Brian Mulroney* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 116.

⁸ P. R. Norris, "Reflecting on Canada's Role in the World: A Foreign Policy Review of Rival Prime Minister's Memoirs," review of *Memoirs: 1939-1993* by Brian Mulroney and *My Years as Prime Minister* by Jean Chretien, *Canadian Journal of History* Spring-Summer (2009): 96.

⁹ Blake, 118.

¹⁰ Nelson Michaud and Kim Richard Nossal, eds., *Diplomatic Departures: The Conservative Era in Canadian Foreign Policy, 1984-93* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), 279.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹² Bill Blaikie, interview by Alexander von Plato, Christopher Kshyk, and Suzanne Zaleski, University of Winnipeg, 25 March 2013.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Heinbecker, 79.

points must not be overstated. Mulroney, on the whole, strove to align Canadian foreign policy as closely as possible with the United States, and largely restrained from publically criticizing American foreign policy. To portray Mulroney as a stooge of the United States however is an over simplification. First, Mulroney genuinely believed, along with a large proportion of the Canadian population, that closer economic ties with the United States through reciprocity would result in greater economic prosperity domestically.¹⁵ During the 1984 election campaign, conducted amidst the backdrop of an economic recession and high inflation, Mulroney promised the Canadian public “jobs, jobs, and jobs.”¹⁶ Economic reform and increasing Canada’s exports became a major feature of both Mulroney’s domestic and foreign policy. Closer relations with the United States, viewed from this paradigm, made both economic and strategic sense, and served to strengthen rather weaken Canada’s national interests.

In addition to building closer relations with the United States, Mulroney also pursued an extensive multilateral foreign policy. One of Mulroney’s most important, multilateral foreign policy initiatives was his opposition to apartheid in South Africa. The Mulroney administration was to eventually adopt three strategies towards South Africa; sanctions, diplomatic support along with substantial financial aid to various apartheid opposition movements, and security assistance to Mozambique which had been severely affected by the South African governments destabilization campaign.¹⁷ On 23 October 1985, Brian Mulroney gave a speech at the UN General Assembly, in which he condemned the apartheid regime, and declared the Canada was, “prepared to invoke total sanctions against that country and its repressive regime.”¹⁸ This promise took practical form in August 1986 at a Commonwealth Summit, in which Mulroney joined with five other commonwealth leaders endorsed a large package of sanctions against South Africa.¹⁹ These included a ban on imports of South African agricultural products, uranium, coal, iron, and steel and Canadian exports on arms and munitions, later extended to include sales of high technology such as computers.²⁰ Indeed, despite Mulroney’s desire to promote closer ties with Britain and the United States, Mulroney repeatedly clashed both Ronald Reagan, and more frequently with Margaret Thatcher over the issue of sanctions on South Africa.²¹ Mulroney’s policies towards Apartheid are evidence of a gradual transformation of Canadian foreign policy, one which increasingly placed greater emphasis on human rights

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁶ Blake, 20.

¹⁷ Michaud and Nossal, 174.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 175, 177.

²¹ Patrick James, Nelson Michaud, and Marc O’Reilly, eds., *Handbook on Canadian Diplomacy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 41.

being intrinsically linked to the global security. In 1989, for example, the Mulroney government strongly condemned the Chinese government's crackdown on protesters in Tiananmen Square, while in 1991 the federal government issued an equally strong denunciation along with sanctions against Indonesia after a similar crackdown on peaceful demonstrations.²² This culminated in the fall of 1991 in an explicit statement on the part of the government to embrace human rights and good governance as a cornerstone of Canada's foreign policy. Henceforth, foreign aid was to be linked to a nation's human rights record and its commitment to democratic principles and governance.²³

One defining aspect of Mulroney's foreign policy was its often personal nature. He established exceptionally close relations with many of the most important leaders of the time, including Ronald Reagan, George Bush Sr., Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, Francois Mitterrand, and Margaret Thatcher. Mulroney conducted annual summits with all three of the American Presidents during his tenure (Reagan, Bush Sr., and Clinton), and made a point of establishing friendly relations with each. One of the most famous instances of such friendship occurred in 1985 at a summit between Mulroney and Reagan in Quebec City, where the two leaders along with their wives joined together to sing "When Irish Eyes are Smiling."²⁴ These annual summits were subsequently scrapped when Jean Chretien became Prime Minister in 1993, as they were perceived at the time to be a symbol of how Canada had become too attached the policies of the United States. However, this is not to say that Chretien repudiated Mulroney's strategic realignment to the United States, quite to the contrary. Bill Blaikie, a New Democratic Party Member of Parliament at the time recalls only one occasion when Chretien refused to support United States foreign policy, namely his refusal in 2003 to join the war in Iraq.²⁵

His relationship with Mitterrand in particular was instrumental in defrosting Canadian-French relations after twenty years of tension, beginning with Charles De Gaulle's open support for Quebec sovereignty at the Canada Exposition in 1967.²⁶ Additionally, Mulroney's relationship with Mitterrand was instrumental in establishing la Francophonie, a francophone summit similar to the Commonwealth Heads of Government conferences. Previously, the French government had been uninterested, or Canada unwilling to allow Quebec a voice on the international stage.²⁷ The summit, which first met in 1986, strove to promote closer ties between different French cultures, and attempted to provide

²² Blake, 125.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Robert Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007), 478.

²⁵ Bill Blaikie interview.

²⁶ Heinbecker, 79.

²⁷ Blake, 123.

an institutional avenue to address common grievances concerning French identity and language.

Despite campaigning on the promise to reverse Trudeau's friendly relations towards the Soviet Union, Mulroney was able to establish a friendly relationship with Mikhail Gorbachev. Though he always maintained tough rhetoric in regards to criticizing the Soviet Union's human's rights record, Mulroney nevertheless grew to admire Gorbachev's take-charge attitude.²⁸ This spirit of cooperation was symbolized by a joint Soviet-Canadian Political Declaration on November 21, 1989, which stated both nations commitment to "consult and co-operate in the search for solutions to the pressing global issues of the day."²⁹ However, the practical implications of warmer relations with the Soviet Union were limited given both leaders preoccupation with other initiative. Nevertheless, Mulroney was able to secure a 1 billion dollar trade deal with the Soviet Union during his 1989 visit, and later secured a new General Exchanges Agreement between the two countries.³⁰

While the focus of this paper is not on Mulroney's economic policies or even on his free-trade agreement with the United States, it is necessary to consider their relative importance to the degree to which they influenced Canada's foreign policy between 1984 and 1993. Free Trade was potentially a dangerous issue for the conservatives to seek election on, as it had previously led to the defeat of Wilfred Laurier in the election of 1911.³¹ Nevertheless, there was considerable logic behind Mulroney's attempts to achieve a free trade agreement with the United States, as the United States was Canada's largest export and import market. By 1990, 75% of all Canadian exports went to the United States, while 64.5% of Canada's imports came from the United States.³² Despite intense controversy and opposition, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was ratified in 1988, and was the single most important bilateral agreement signed with the United States during Mulroney's premiership. Subsequent negotiations were carried out for a more comprehensive trade agreement to include Mexico after the Mexican government approached the United States for a separate free trade agreement.³³ The Mulroney government were thus forced, in a sense, to engage in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for fear of a disadvantageous hub and spoke trade relationship developing with the United States.³⁴ Though unintended, the trilateral agreement signed in 1992 between

²⁸ J.L. Granatstein, *Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd, 1993), 304.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 305, 307.

³¹ Heinbecker, 76.

³² Roy Rempel, *Counterweights: The Failure of Canada's German and European Policy, 1955-1995* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 166.

³³ Heinbecker, 77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Canada, the United States, and Mexico, ensured that United States would not be able to manipulate its trade policies, and established at least the principle of an equitable trade relationship between the three partners. Viewed from this perspective, FTA and NAFTA must be considered one of Brian Mulroney's greatest foreign policy achievements.

The FTA Agreement of 1988 and the evolution into the trilateral NAFTA agreement in 1992 were not the only bilateral accomplishment of Mulroney's administration. Other accomplishments included the Canada-US Arctic Cooperation Agreement of 1988, which resolved a longstanding dispute over American access through the Northwest Passage, and the Acid Rain Agreement in 1991.³⁵ This last agreement, in particular, was achieved through Mulroney's personal initiative and relentless lobbying on the part of the Canadian government in Washington.³⁶ He raised the subject of a bilateral acid rain treaty at every meeting with George Bush Sr. and finally forced the United States into a comprehensive agreement by pre-empting them with a unilateral 300 million pledge to cut Canadian acid rain emissions by half, in effect shaming the United States into cooperation.³⁷ However, Mulroney was to go further in terms of his environmental policies. In 1987, Canada signed the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer, hosted the first international conference on climate change in 1988, the World Conference on Changing Atmosphere, in Toronto, and was the first industrialized nation to sign the Biodiversity Convention.³⁸ For these actions, Brian Mulroney was given the title of Canada's Greenest Prime Minister in a 2006 poll.³⁹

With regards to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Brian Mulroney stated in his *Memoirs* that "those two months, November and December 1989, were among the most exhilarating I was to experience... Canada and Canadians were being asked to play a significant role of history's stage at a vital moment."⁴⁰ This statement however, is merely political bombast and fails to hold up to closer scrutiny. Canada's role in the process of German Re-unification was marginal at best. Canada was never present in any of the two-plus four discussions, and it does not appear that either Brian Mulroney or Joe Clark ever made any serious attempt to be included in the negotiations. Our closest connection to the great power deliberations was at the Open Skies Conference in Ottawa, where the genesis for the two-plus four process was first discussed. Yet, this was more a product of luck, as the subject of German Reunification was never on the agenda of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Mulroney, 709.

conference.⁴¹ The government, nevertheless, utilized the opportunity after the conference to portray Canada's as having actively participated in the process. As such, one of the questions that re-occurred throughout our research was whether or not Canada could have played a larger role in the great power discussions through the forum of two-plus four. In particular, we wondered whether or not the fact that Canada maintained a substantial military presence in Germany would have been sufficient leverage to gain participation into the two-plus-four deliberations, or even to have been given a special status similar to that of Poland over the Oder-Neisse border. In addition, we wondered whether or status as a victor power (though not as an occupying power) over the Third Reich in the Second World War had earned Canada a spot at the negotiating table.

Robert Fowler, alone out of our interviewee's, believes that there was a realistic possibility for Canada to have actively participated in the 2+4 process. He mentions the reasons stated above as sufficient evidence that allowed Canada a golden opportunity to engage in the reunification discussions, an opportunity squandered by the Mulroney governments lack of vision, will, and ineptitude.⁴² Our other interviewees, however, were more reserved in their analysis.

Heinbecker, for instance, while doubting the feasibility of Canada's participation the two plus four process, nevertheless stresses in his book that Mulroney exerted considerable energy behind the scenes in pressing France and Britain in support Kohl's position of a reunified Germany.⁴³ It is nevertheless interesting that, as far as our research could demonstrate, the Mulroney administration accepted Canada's exclusion from the two plus four negotiations as a *fait accompli* and without opposition.

What then were the alternatives for Canadian foreign policy during this period? One possibility, advanced by Bill Blaikie and elaborated in the report of the Standing Committee for External Affairs and International Trade from June 1990, was for Canada to advocate for a new common security system in Europe, which include countries from both NATO and the Warsaw, and would in effect transcend the rival organizations and make them defunct.⁴⁴ In contrast to Pierre Trudeau, Mulroney had a more pragmatic understanding of Canada's position in the world and was largely able to maximize Canada's influence through maintain friendly relations with the United States, Mulroney, though, never seems to have given this idea any credence. At a speech at a commencement ceremony at

⁴¹ Ursula Lehmkuhl, "The 'Ottawa Formula' and TransAtlantic Relations: Politics and Diplomacy of the 'Two-Plus-Four' Negotiations," *EuroStudia – Transatlantic Journal for European Studies* 5/2 (December 2009): 1.

⁴² Robert Fowler, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato, Winnipeg and Ottawa via Skype, March 18, 2013.

⁴³ Heinbecker, 80.

⁴⁴ Bill Blaikie interview.

Stanford University, Mulroney argued that former Warsaw Pact countries that embraced democracy should be allowed to join NATO.⁴⁵ In addition, the government never publically, nor to our knowledge privately, responded to the report by the Standing Committee for External Affairs and International Trade when it was presented before the House of Commons.⁴⁶ Heinbecker, for his part, was skeptical in our interview of the feasibility of such a proposal, describing it as an NDP pipedream.⁴⁷ This lack of response can be taken as evidence that the conservative government did not wish to address the topic or of it standing in opposition to Mulroney's opinions on the subject. This ensured that the Prime Minister always had the ear of the President of the United States, though the degree to which Mulroney was able to influence events in Canada's favor is debatable and probably was at best marginal.

In terms of military policy, Mulroney largely continued his predecessors' policies, and no discernible shift in doctrine, or training occurred. Despite repeated promises for significant increases in defense expenditure, most evident in the 1986 White Paper on defense, these plans were scrapped as the cold war slowly came to an end.⁴⁸ For example, the department of defense was promised a 6 percent increase in funding for the 1986, but ultimately received only a 2.75 percent increase.⁴⁹ This trend was only exacerbated after the fall of the Berlin Wall. After the reunification of Germany, and the symbolic end of the cold war, the Canadian military was suddenly faced with a rapid transition from peacekeeping operations to large-scale military operations. The first of such operations occurred in the Persian Gulf, where Canada sent a significant air squadron along with ground troops to participate in the US led coalition to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. These were the first combat operations that Canada had undertaken since the Korean War (1950-1953). This was followed shortly thereafter by the outbreak of ethnic conflict and civil war in Yugoslavia, to which Canada deployed substantial forces from its existing bases in Germany. Indeed, Brian Mulroney was the first western leader to call for active military intervention in the growing civil war in the Balkans.⁵⁰ The second consequence of the end of the cold war was severe budget cutbacks for the military. This took the form of not only reducing defense appropriations at home but also scaling back Canada's commitments abroad. This was most notable in the closure of Canada's military bases at Baden and Lahr's in Germany in 1993-1994. These had been

⁴⁵ Heinbecker, 85-6.

⁴⁶ Bill Blaikie interview.

⁴⁷ Paul Heinbecker, interview by Alexander von Plato, Karen Brglez, and Chris Clements, Ottawa, 21 January 2013.

⁴⁸ J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004,) 131.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Blake, 127.

foreshadowed in the 1990 budget, delivered shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The rationale for such actions was sensible; with no obvious enemy to prepare for war against, it seemed that additional appropriations for the military were unnecessary, and could be redirected to other domestic priorities.

The legacy of Brian Mulroney's tenure as Prime Minister is a complicated one, particularly in terms of his domestic policies. Yet, there can be no doubt that Brian Mulroney was one of Canada's most activist and successful foreign policy Prime Minister's in Canada's history. Mulroney inaugurated a new era in Canada international orientation, pivoting our diplomacy towards the United States, though both the FTA and NAFTA agreements and membership in the OAS, an economic and strategic alignment which endures to this day. While at times controversial, the logic of this shift in Canada's diplomacy was largely inevitable given our substantial economic links with the United States. His policies foreshadowed the emerging human security doctrine, through his innovative aid policies to Ethiopia, to his principled stand against the apartheid regime in South Africa. During his premiership, Canada forces were once again deployed in combat operation, first in the Gulf War and later as part of the UN peacekeeping and NATO military operations during the Yugoslavian civil war. Less idealistic than either Thatcher or Reagan, he often clashed with both, most famously over the question of South African sanctions, when he believed a principle was at stake. Yet, on the question of German Reunification, the major subject of this work, Mulroney remained largely absent from the international stage. While he supported the American position and gave strong diplomatic support to Helmut Kohl throughout the two plus four negotiations, Canada's unwillingness to exert any diplomatic pressure to secure a seat at the negotiating table, is puzzling given Canada's role in the Second World War and her continued military presence in Germany. Whether Canada could have successfully asserted her position is questionable, that the Mulroney government made no public (and from the evidence private) attempts to secure such a status is surprising given Mulroney's previous record of asserting and expanding Canada's global position after 1984. Nevertheless, Brian Mulroney's foreign policy must be regarded on the whole as innovative, multilateral, and highly successful in promoting Canadian interests and Canada's reputation around the world.