

Introduction to Part II: Canada and the End of the Cold War in the Literature, Files, and in the Eyes of the Politicians

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The second part of this publication deals with the role of Canada in German unification and the end of the Cold War. Several themes that emerged from this topic are reflected in the individual contributions. The papers in this volume examine – the special role of Canada in the world, Canada’s foreign policy engagement during the Trudeau and Mulroney years, Canada’s involvement in NATO, the weight of Canada in the “two-plus-four” negotiations, Canada’s special relationship to Poland and the Ukraine concerning German unification, and the role of the Canadian media in memorializing Cold War events. Our intention is to inform and contribute to the continuing debate regarding Canada’s role in the world at the end of the twentieth century.

Canada became firmly entrenched in the Cold War between 1949-1950 with the establishment of NATO and their respective involvement in the Korean War. By 1951 Canada redeployed troops to Europe stationing them in the British zone of the Federal Republic of Germany. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s hostility towards the Soviet Union dominated Canadian foreign policy decision making. Fear directed towards the Soviets encouraged Canadians to be strongly committed to their international multilateral organizations, i.e. the United Nations and NATO. The political currents changed in the late 1960s, and Canada found itself in a new stage of the Cold War with the arrival of the Trudeau era. Prime Minister Trudeau introduced new thinking into Canadian foreign policy. He believed it to be imperative that Canada have “counterweights” to prevent American domination, which drew him closer to Europe and softened relations with the Soviet Union. He questioned whether the Soviet Union was the proper focus for Canadian foreign policy, promptly ordering a review of NATO policy, to make sure that Canadian defense policy was first serving national interests, above NATO interests. In the spirit of détente, he normalized relations with Communist China and the Soviet Union, and extended engagement with the Third World. In 1971 Trudeau visited the Soviet Union and signed a protocol agreeing “to enlarge and deepen consultations on important international problems of mutual interest and on questions of bilateral relations.”¹ He cozied up with

¹ Costas Melakopides, *Pragmatic Idealism: Canadian Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 94.

communist leader Fidel Castro during his 1976 visit to Havana and had close relations with Soviet ambassador to Canada, Alexander Yakovlev.

Trudeau's actions provoked tensions with Washington. He angered the Americans when in a speech given at Notre Dame University he suggested Canada was edging towards "equidistance" between East and West. Relations were further strained in 1980 when Trudeau introduced the National Energy Program, which the U.S. perceived to be a direct threat to its industries.² By the time Reagan was elected to the White House in January 1981, tensions between Canada and the U.S. were at an all-time high.³ Thatcher and Reagan, the Cold Warriors of the 1980s were exasperated by Trudeau's liberal idealistic politics.

In one final push at the end of his political career, Trudeau made one last major attempt for global reconciliation with his 1983 Peace Initiative. It was his last effort as Prime Minister to help ease the East-West conflict by lowering Cold War tensions. The initiative was launched on October 27 by a major public address in Canada. The action plan involved a substantial amount of travel to visit leaders in Europe, Asia, and the United States to discuss a number of proposals on nuclear arms control, bans on deployment of high-altitude weapons, and the conversion of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe into a foreign ministers meeting. The initial results of the initiative were deemed insignificant, yet as Trudeau announced his retirement from politics one year later his mark had been left on world affairs.

Canadians entered a new period of foreign policy directives with the 1984 election of the Mulroney government. Prime Minister Mulroney quickly moved to restore relations with the United States; establishing close partnerships with Reagan and later Bush Sr. For his first visit with Reagan he hosted the "Shamrock Summit" in Quebec City in 1985. The carefully orchestrated conference quickly revealed that the frigidness of the previous decades had disappeared. Mulroney's government abandoned its search for "counterweights" against American domination, believing that cultivating strong ties with the U.S. would bring advantages to Canada. This was most evident with the signing of the Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1987.

Mulroney came into power close to the same time as the young and energetic Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister first met Gorbachev at Konstantin Chernenko's funeral in 1985 and was immediately impressed by Gorbachev's take-charge attitude.⁴ Two visits in quick succession between the governments, one to the USSR by Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark in June 1985, and a second meeting in Ottawa in 1986 renewed the ten-year Canadian-Soviet agreement on economic, technology, and scientific

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ J.L. Granatstein, *Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd, 1993), 304.

cooperation that had been signed ten years earlier in 1976. Although the Mulroney government worked to restore relations with the USSR in the mid-1980s after they had been shattered with the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the government acted cautiously towards the Soviets willingness to enact reforms. They were slow to undertake new policy directives in Canadian-Soviet relations while they watched the changes sweep across Eastern Europe from the sidelines.

During the late 1980s, as Eastern reforms gathered momentum, the Canadian government was in the process of undergoing a complete defense review. The report published in 1987 indicated that the money once spent on the Canadian military, was now reserved for desired domestic social spending. Mulroney's wish to further Canadian military commitments to NATO was constrained for budgetary reasons. Canada's reduced military status frustrated their western allies and further emphasized the foreign policy retreat from globalism to continentalism in the Mulroney years.

The pace of change in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union increased dramatically by 1989 and carried into the early nineties. The Berlin Wall fell, Solidarity was re-legalized in Poland leading to democratic elections, the Warsaw Pact collapsed, and the Soviet Union quickly disintegrated. The Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the Western powers had been a real threat to global security for decades and within a few short years disappeared from the international scene. The Mulroney government proved to be an active player in foreign affairs throughout these tumultuous years. It is our interest in these formative times that this publication sprang. The following essays are devoted to examining the Canadian response at the end of the Cold War and to determine the level of Canada's engagement with a changing world.