

## FROM PRIDE TO INFLUENCE: TOWARDS A NEW CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY

**MICHAEL HART**  
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**Review by Don Campbell\***

Defining ourselves in terms of our relationship with the United States has been from our very beginnings a preoccupation of Canadians from the prime minister to the man or woman on the street. Rarely has there been a consensus as to what that relationship should be or that our leadership has got it right, a luxury of our dependence on a neighbour, normally benign and its attention turned elsewhere. Michael Hart, in his call for becoming even more firmly intertwined with the United States as not only the foundation of our foreign policy but as the lens through which we view and value all of our international relationships and initiatives, clearly throws down the gauntlet.

Hart painstakingly traces Canada's record on foreign policy through the twentieth century and, like many others, contends we have lost our way. He demonstrates that the world where Canada, as a middle power, played a useful if not always important role, was listened to, and had influenced, has long since gone. Canada, he argues, particularly in the Chrétien-Martin period, has been adrift in its foreign policy, riding on a sense of false pride and sticking our finger in the American eye to our detriment.

Hart outlines two competing approaches to the direction and conduct of foreign policy that have characterized our debate and our actions over the last twenty years. The pragmatists would pursue an interests-based agenda that would place the United States at the centre of our foreign policy agenda. The romantics would embrace an activist, multilateralist, values-based agenda, trying to "make a difference in the world" and largely differentiating ourselves from the United States.

He recognizes a third default option—those who would muddle through, reacting to events with little strategy supporting decisions, resulting in drift and irrelevance.

Hart comes down firmly on the side of a pragmatic, interests-based approach.

He posits that our foreign and trade policy must be based on two fundamental tenets: our economic prosperity and our security. Only the United States can ensure and guarantee both of these and, accordingly, our foreign policy must be directed and focused almost exclusively to building and fostering this relationship.

Hart recognizes that there will be other relationships we may want to pursue, but these should either be done in conjunction with the United States to offer some chance of success or managed in a way that does not unnecessarily irritate our neighbour. We must accept we are a North American state, our interests lie here, and we have to exploit the benefit of proximity and attachment to the world's only superpower.

Hart notes that Canadians will expect their government to be involved in humanitarian and other activities ranging from peacekeeping to development assistance and disaster relief. He accepts that Canadians also expect services abroad, such as trade promotion and consular

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assistance, but that these are secondary and should only be provided to the extent we can afford them.

Hart lays blame for the drift he perceives as taking place at the door of political leadership, or lack of it. He is critical of a bureaucracy that he considers often does not get it or does not want to get it, and considers the perennial budget cutting, to which the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in particular has been subjected, a lesser issue.

Hart's views and conclusions are too stark and uni-dimensional.

He is right that our relationship with the United States must be our primordial relationship. The foreign policy of any country is a function of its geopolitical realities. Economic recession has, if anything, made the management of our relationship more critical. The threat of protectionism, the debate on energy and global warming, the effects of the stimulus packages, and the thickening of the border are all critical issues affecting our economic and security future and must be the bread and butter of our foreign policy.

While Hart is not suggesting we need always "to go along to get along" with the United States, his analysis would have had Canada supporting the United States in Iraq. Clearly, Jean Chrétien's decision not to participate was one of the better decisions he made, even if the manner in which he had this communicated to the United States apparently left something to be desired. On the other hand, Canada's decision not to participate in the US Missile Defense initiative was not a decision that any interests-based approach to our foreign policy could support.

Any interests-based policy must, however, address a world beyond the United States. Hart's view seems to be that approaches and initiatives in the rest of the world are of lesser importance and indeed optional. A longer view of the future shows the importance of cultivating our relationships with China and India, in particular, as we move to a multi-polar world where the United States will increasingly have to share the podium. Canada needs to nurture its relationships with these and others and not just as an adjunct to our US relationship.

Hart notes that Canada needs to devote itself to shaping the international rules, institutional relationships, and frameworks, since these are important in reducing the disparity in power between the big movers and shakers and the rest of us. Those he derides as romantics have often been and are engaged in these very processes. The international trade policy framework, to which Hart has been a contributor, has over the years been largely completed. International economic institutions and political and security organizations are in urgent need of reform. While power will dominate results or lack of them, no one has a monopoly on ideas, and Canada has been and should be a contributor. Working with the United States will be essential but is not the only avenue.

Hart's support for the Harper government's foreign policy approach in its early days is at odds with his pursuit of pragmatism. The prime minister's policy in freezing relations with China reveals a misguided idealist bent. Lack of leadership and a wait-and-react mode on most of the important bilateral issues with the Obama administration has left us flat-footed compared to the United States. We are in danger in moving from drift to irrelevance.

Hart's book is an intriguing blend of polemic and prescription, along with a detailed historical analysis developed to support his thesis. It is richly researched—although over

seventy pages of footnotes may prove diverting for the general reader, as are the inserts offering a primer on subjects as varied as dealing with the media to sweat shops in the developing world. One gets the sense he is trying to cover an audience ranging from freshman students to seasoned practitioners of diplomacy.

The book is an important contribution to the debate on both the direction of our foreign policy and how we should conduct it. It should leave no reader indifferent.

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