

# US PRESIDENTS AND CANADIAN PRIME MINISTERS: GOOD VIBES, OR NOT

Gil Troy and L. Ian MacDonald

A look back at seven decades of presidents and prime ministers shows that, like atoms, American and Canadian leaders may not always like one another, yet the molecular bond between these two democracies remains all but unbreakable. Two truths underlie these ups and downs. First, Canadians think a lot more about the US and are more critical of America. The second and more important truth is that the countries fundamentally share a continent and have common values, beginning with democracy. Presidential historian Gil Troy and *Policy Options* Editor L. Ian MacDonald consider the impact and importance of relations between US presidents and Canadian prime ministers.



Un peu à l'image de particules d'atomes, un retour sur les présidents américains et les premiers ministres canadiens des 70 dernières années montre qu'ils n'ont pas toujours filé le parfait amour, mais que les liens qui unissent nos deux démocraties sont restés indestructibles. Deux vérités se dégagent de ces relations contrastées. Tout d'abord, les Canadiens s'intéressent davantage aux États-Unis que l'inverse et sont plus critiques à leur égard. Mais surtout, les deux pays partagent un même continent et des valeurs communes, à commencer par celle de la démocratie. L'historien Gil Troy et le rédacteur en chef d'*Options politiques* L. Ian MacDonald analysent l'importance et les répercussions des liens entre les chefs d'État des deux nations au fil du temps.

When President Barack Obama hosted Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the White House in early February, the good vibes triggered a stream of positive appraisals.

Lawrence Martin, a noted student of Canada-US relations, wrote afterwards in the *Globe and Mail*: “One of the unnoticed successes of the Harper years has been his adroit stewardship of the Canadian-American relationship.” While noting that Harper and Obama might not seem an obvious ideological fit, Martin added: “On Afghanistan, on the auto bailout, on climate change and now on border security and trade, he has either hitched wagons or effectively collaborated with the Democratic administration.”

Thanks to their surprising personal chemistry, the two young, mid-baby-boomer leaders forged ways to cooperate on important matters, including a secure and smart border. But this dynamic was not inevitable. The left-leaning, Ivy League elitist American could have recoiled from the right-leaning Canadian bloke. A quick glance at seven decades of presidents and prime ministers shows that, like atoms, American and Canadian leaders may not always like one another, yet the molecular bond between these two North American democracies remains all but unbreakable. As

Obama noted at his joint news conference with Harper at the White House, the US and Canada “are woven together like no other two countries in the world.”

In the modern period, the partnership of Franklin D. Roosevelt and William Lyon Mackenzie King set the template. They both dominated their respective governments for much of the Great Depression and the Second World War. And each was the longest-serving president or prime minister in his country’s history — Roosevelt for 12 years, and King for an amazing 22 years in all. FDR was far more charismatic — and popular — than was King.

Warren Harding made the first presidential visit to Canada on a Vancouver stopover from Alaska in 1923. Roosevelt made the first consequential visit to Canada in Quebec City in 1936. “I have never heard a Canadian refer to an American as a ‘foreigner,’” Roosevelt said in Quebec City. “He is just an ‘American.’ And in that same way, in the United States, Canadians are not ‘foreigners,’ they are ‘Canadians.’”

In August 1938, Roosevelt went back to Canada when he received an honorary degree from Queen’s University and delivered a convocation address, in which he famously pledged that America would defend Canada if it was

attacked. “The Dominion of Canada is part of the sisterhood of the British Empire,” he declared. “I give to you assurance that the people of the United States will not stand idly by if domination of Canadian soil is threatened by any other empire.” The audience, outdoors at Richardson Stadium, cheered him to the echo. The prime minister

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was in attendance, and Roosevelt referred to his fellow Harvard graduate as a graduate of “that university in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to which Mackenzie King and I both belong,” to appreciative laughter from the crowd. The speech was carried live on radio in the United States. Later that day, the president and the prime minister officially opened the Thousand Islands Bridge linking Canada and the United States. (In an interesting footnote to history, Bill Clinton presented a framed reading copy of FDR’s Queen’s University speech, complete with his hand written marginal notations, to Brian Mulroney at the White House in 1993. Fifteen years later, in 2008, Mulroney donated it to Queen’s University.)

In August 1943, Roosevelt returned to Canada for the week-long Quebec Conference, which approved what would become Operation Overlord — the storming of the beaches of Normandy that began the liberation of Europe in June 1944. Mackenzie King was delighted to host the summit, as he was to host the second Quebec Conference in September 1944, which outlined the shape of the postwar world. On that occasion, Roosevelt received a second honorary degree from a Canadian university, McGill University, as did Winston

Churchill. The two Quebec summits showed Canada to be if not on an equal footing with the United States and the United Kingdom, a staunch ally of both and a sovereign country in its own right.

After the first Quebec Conference, Roosevelt spoke to a crowd of more than 25,000 people gathered on

Parliament Hill in Ottawa on August 25, 1943. Looking out at the crowd from the archway at the foot of the Peace Tower, FDR turned to King, saying, “Mr. King, my old friend. Your course and mine have run so closely and affectionately during these many long years that this meeting adds another link to that chain. I have always felt at home in Canada and you, I think, have always felt at home in the United States.” As he toured Ottawa, residents held up black Scottie dogs to honour FDR’s dog Fala.

Roosevelt’s successor, Harry Truman, was less impressed with King. A no-nonsense middle-class type of guy — he wasn’t known as “Give ‘Em Hell Harry” for nothing — Truman lacked Roosevelt’s aristocratic breeding and his appreciation for King’s finesse. Instead, the president from Missouri, the “Show Me” state, was put off by King’s many idiosyncrasies, while nevertheless admiring his nimble-footed talents as a parliamentary actor. “As a speaker and a writer he is lacking the essential gifts of clarity, force and ease,” Truman would note. “On the floor of the House he is a past master at evasion in answering questions but in rough and tumble debate he scores many more points than he loses. He is primarily a student. He is a bachelor and

devotes a large part of his leisure to reading and abstract thinking.”

Nevertheless, Truman admitted that King’s White House state dinner was one of his favourites, “because the President could talk to the guest of honour with some chance of being understood.” And when Truman visited Ottawa in June 1947, parliamentarians banged their desks in approval when he praised Canada’s unity. “Canada is enriched by the heritage of France as well as of Britain, and Quebec has imparted the vitality and spirit of France itself to Canada,” he declared. “Canada’s notable achievement of national unity and progress through accommodation, moderation and forbearance can be studied with profit by her sister nations.”

Overall, Canada was a cooperative if somewhat marginal player, as Truman forged the postwar international economic infrastructure and the international structure for the Cold War fight against Soviet Communism. Canada was a founding member of the NATO alliance in 1949 and, like the US, stationed troops in Europe for 40 years until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of what Ronald Reagan later styled “the evil empire.”

Dwight Eisenhower enjoyed tremendous stature in Canada, having been the commanding general who led the Allies to victory in the Second World War. In Louis St-Laurent, his Canadian counterpart, the aging Ike had a kindred spirit, if not a close friend. As Lawrence Martin writes in his illuminating book *The Presidents and the Prime Ministers: Washington and Ottawa Face to Face: The Myth of Bilateral Bliss 1867-1982*, Eisenhower and St-Laurent were both “elderly, aloof statesmen, both cut from the chairman-of-the-board mould, both late and rather reluctant politicians. They didn’t become close friends. They saw each other only four times in their



*The Gazette, Montreal*

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney greets President Ronald Reagan as Reagan steps off Air Force One on his arrival in Quebec City for the Shamrock Summit on March 17, 1985. The PM and the president agreed to a process that led to the free trade talks and appointed high-level envoys on acid rain. They also famously performed a duet, singing “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.”

five years together as heads of government. But Ike and Uncle Louis shared a distant respect. Their relationship was close to the relationship the president wanted for the two countries; they were like country-club cousins.” They also shared a love of golf and once played a round together, at the famed Augusta National course, in 1956. The most significant bilateral

achievement of the Eisenhower and St-Laurent years was the decision in 1954 to build the St. Lawrence Seaway. Ike returned to Canada in 1959 to open it with the Queen. The prime minister attending that day was named John Diefenbaker.

John Diefenbaker became prime minister in June 1957, and he and Ike shared a western farm background

and had a passion for fishing. In July 1958, Diefenbaker and Eisenhower went fishing together at Harrington Lake, which a year later would become the PM’s official summer residence — in a sense, Canada’s Camp David. Most significantly, Diefenbaker pushed through Canada’s participation in the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). This

integrated command helped defend North America during the Cold War, weaving the two neighbours together in a web of overlapping ties, structures, ideas and agendas.

Yet the NORAD decision triggered anti-American sentiment north of the border. US State Department officials were also frustrated that Canada declined to join the Organization of American States. It wasn't until the Mulroney years that Canada finally joined the OAS, in 1990. These tensions did not shake the Eisenhower-Diefenbaker bond. But they anticipated the rocky relations of the Kennedy years — and furthered the phenomenon of Canadian elite disdain for the US, which became pronounced during the tumultuous 1960s. Eisenhower was one of only two US presidents to address a joint session of Parliament on two occasions, in 1953 and again in 1958, the other being Ronald Reagan in 1981 and 1987. "It is a fact that our common frontier grows stronger every year, defended only by friendship," Ike declared in his 1953 speech.

In July 1958 he told Parliament: "There must never be a final word between friends." Then he and Dief went fishing at Harrington Lake.

Much later, Diefenbaker would write in his memoirs, *One Canada*: "I might add that President Eisenhower and I were from our first meeting on an 'Ike-John' basis, and that we were as close as the nearest telephone."

**W**hen John F. Kennedy was inaugurated president in January 1961, Diefenbaker was one of the few doubters who resisted the JFK euphoria. The usually smooth Kennedy mispronounced the sensitive Canadian's polysyllabic name twice — each time as Diefenbawker — first when he announced Diefenbaker's visit to Washington, and then when he was welcomed at Ottawa's airport for his

visit a few months later. The 43-year-old Kennedy, the youngest man ever elected president, found the 65-year-old Diefenbaker plodding. After the first visit in February, he told aides he never wanted "to see the boring son of a bitch again."

Yet in mid-May, Kennedy made his first foreign trip as president to Ottawa — an important symbolic salute to Canada. Kennedy spoke eloquently to Parliament, saying that, as North Americans, "our historic task in this embattled age is not merely to defend freedom. It is to extend its writ and strengthen its covenant." Kennedy described the US-Canadian relationship beautifully: "Geography has made us neighbours. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies." Today, those words are among quotations from American presidents graven in stone at the new US embassy

**While Canadian and American policies usually were in sync, Canadians spent a lot more time thinking about their relationship with the United States — and resenting it — than did Americans. Pearson's successor, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, told the National Press Club in Washington in 1969 that "living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly or temperate the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."**

chancery on Sussex Drive in Ottawa, opened by President Clinton in 1999.

Privately, the alliance was less solid, with Kennedy lobbying a hesitant Diefenbaker to deploy US missiles and nuclear warheads in Canada. Following the meeting, Kennedy threw his back out during a tree planting ceremony on the lawn outside Government House, perhaps the most painful moment an American president has had on Canadian soil during the various Canadian-American summits.

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Parliament Hill protest opposing the move. At one point, Diefenbaker humiliated the American ambassador by brandishing a briefing memo Kennedy had forgotten in Ottawa; it reminded the President to "push" the PM on various issues, including deploying nuclear warheads. More than a year later, after the State Department criticized some statements Diefenbaker made in a House of Commons speech, Canada recalled its ambassador to the US home in protest.

The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 made things worse. Diefenbaker resented Kennedy's delay before informing him about the crisis. Kennedy found Diefenbaker's subsequent suggestions unhelpful and was furious when the PM waited three days before putting Canadian soldiers on alert. At one point Diefenbaker complained about Kennedy: "He's a hot-

head. He's a fool — too young, too brash, too inexperienced, and a boastful son of a bitch!"

**U**ltimately, the nuclear issue split Diefenbaker's government. The government fell and went to elections in April 1963, resulting in the accession to power of Lester B. Pearson and the Liberals. Pearson, who won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the 1956 Middle East Suez Crisis, believed that Canada should fulfill its treaty obligations to NATO and deploy the weapons. He also had warm relations with President Kennedy, having infuriated Diefenbaker earlier by spending nearly an hour chatting privately with the president at a White House dinner celebrating Nobel laure-

ates, an occasion immortalized as JFK's "Easter Egghead Roll."

An intellectual who believed that "ideas are explosive," Lester Pearson was a great match for the Harvard-educated millionaire president who loved gathering smart people around him. Unfortunately, Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 created another mismatch, between Pearson and Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson. Johnson was a vulgarian, a big, profane Texan who loved bullying people, giving them the "Johnson treatment." Pearson was elegant, deliberate, an Oxford-trained diplomat who preferred cajoling but had deeply felt beliefs and his own ways of getting things done.

This time, it was the President who was touchier than the Prime Minister. During their first Washington summit in January 1964, Johnson was annoyed that Pearson spent so much time with the elegant Oxonian secretary of state, Dean Rusk. Johnson erupted in fury a year later, in April 1965, when Pearson accepted the Temple University World Peace Prize. Tempers were flaring over America's involvement in Vietnam — and Canada's refusal to send troops, despite Johnson's demand. In his speech, Pearson called for a bombing halt. Livid, Johnson summoned Pearson to Camp David the next day. When they met, Johnson gave Pearson the "treatment," grabbing the prime minister by the lapels and shouting: "Don't you come into my living room and piss on my rug."

Pearson subsequently apologized to Johnson and would insist in his memoirs that relations improved. Even though Canada never sent troops to Vietnam, Canada remained an important ally during the Cold War. Moreover, Pearson created his own version of Johnson's "Great Society," shepherding the passage of public health care and the Canada-Quebec

Pension Plan through Parliament. The most important economic agreement between Canada and the US during the Johnson-Pearson years was the North American Auto Pact, sectoral forerunner of the Free Trade Agreement, signed by the President and the PM at the LBJ Ranch in January 1965. Johnson also briefly visited Pearson at Harrington Lake in May 1967 following a lightning visit to Expo 67 and Buckminster Fuller's celebrated geodesic dome, which was the US pavilion at the Montreal world exposition. Pearson arrived before Johnson, and as he walked through the kitchen, a US Secret Service agent who didn't recognize him asked him what he was doing there. Pearson, as he later wrote in his memoirs, *Mike*, replied that he lived there.

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Canadians spent a lot more time thinking about their relationship with the United States — and resenting it — than did Americans. Pearson's successor, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, told the National Press Club in Washington in 1969 that "living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly or temperate the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."

While Trudeau and his American counterpart Richard Nixon were both intellectuals, they, too, were mismatched. Trudeau was a flamboyant, charming progressive with a mane of long hair, sixties-style; Nixon was a closed, mistrusting conservative. After one Oval Office summit with Trudeau,

President Nixon turned to his chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, muttering about that "pompous egghead," saying: "That Trudeau, he's a clever son of a bitch." Then Nixon asked Henry Kissinger: "What in the Christ is he talking about?"

Nixon also complained to Haldeman: "You've got to put it to these people for kicking the US around after what we did for that lousy son of a bitch. Give it to somebody around here" — meaning plant a critical story about Trudeau with a willing reporter.

Beyond the lingering tensions over Vietnam, the US and Canada clashed over trade issues, the value of the Canadian dollar and Canadian fears of US "cultural imperialism." In 1972, Secretary of the Treasury John Connally was demanding trade concessions, and American negotiators complained about Ottawa's "bush-league mandarins." Trudeau bristled: "With friends like Secretary Connally, who needs enemies?"

When Nixon visited Ottawa in April 1972, it was a mission of diplomatic damage control. Security was so tight, *Time* magazine reported, that "US Secret Servicemen even hosed down the mushy snow banks near Parliament Hill, to eliminate the potential threat of snowballs being hurled." Dispensing with the pretence of charming his hosts, Nixon delivered a lesson in realpolitik to Parliament, saying: "It is time for us to recognize that we have separate identities, that we have significant differences, and that nobody's interests are furthered when these realities are obscured. Each nation must define the nature of its own interests, decide the requirements of its own security, and determine the path of its own progress."

Nixon corrected his insult months earlier to Canada, when he incorrectly called Japan America's largest trading partner. "Canada is

the largest trading partner of the US. It is very important that that be noted in Japan too,” he said, eliciting applause and guffaws. More awkwardly, Nixon at one point spoke in abysmal French, apologizing for mangling “a language I studied 37 years ago.”

When it turned out that Nixon had called Trudeau an “asshole” on one of the tapes revealed as part of the Watergate scandal, which destroyed his presidency, Trudeau was unfazed. The prime minister responded,

None of them succeeded as dramatically as their supporters hoped or their opponents feared. Mulroney emerged as the most moderate, Thatcher as the most strident. All three, however, helped reorient the collective conversation from focusing on government solutions to the practical and philosophical consequences of relying on government handouts. All three also offered models of bold, symbolic, tone-setting leadership suited to the media realities of modern politics.

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Relations improved dramatically when Gerald Ford became president after Nixon resigned in August 1974. Trudeau wrote in his memoirs: “Of all the American presidents I had occasion to deal with, what set Ford apart was that he did nothing I can remember that rubbed Canada the wrong way. It was Gerald Ford, in fact, who was responsible for one of the greatest achievements of Canadian foreign policy” — welcoming Canada to the G7, the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations. Trudeau explained: “For a middle power like Canada, membership in this powerful group is important, so we owe much to Gerald Ford.”

Trudeau formed an even warmer bond with Jimmy Carter. Trudeau saw in Carter the qualities he hoped others would see in him, calling Carter “very cerebral, very well briefed, and highly principled. He was well known for promoting human rights and — even rarer for an American president — he had a genuine interest in the Third World.” Always taking a compet-

itive, even zero-sum, approach to the US, Trudeau would write: “Carter’s weakness with Congress actually had an effect on Canada as well. He and I decided that it was time to resolve the longstanding dispute between our two countries over maritime boundaries and the management of fish stocks.” It was former president Carter who led the American delegation at Trudeau’s funeral in Montreal in 2000.

The next Canadian prime minister, Joe Clark, was in office for such a short period that he and President

Carter did not meet before the fall of the Conservative government in December 1979, barely six months after its election. Carter had been scheduled to visit Ottawa in the fall of 1979, but the visit was cancelled in the wake of the hostage crisis at the US embassy in Iran, an event that would seal the fate of Carter’s presidency in the 1980 election against Ronald Reagan. But it was under the Clark government that Canadian diplomats sheltered six American colleagues at the Canadian embassy in Tehran, and later spirited them out of the country, an event that transformed the Canadian ambassador, Ken Taylor, into a celebrity in America.

Bilateral relations deteriorated in January 1981 with Ronald Reagan’s inauguration. A conservative revolutionary, he vowed to stand up to the Soviets. Trudeau viewed Reagan as a sabre-rattling, warmongering yahoo. Reagan viewed Trudeau as a Soviet-appeasing, America-bashing hippie. When Reagan first came to Ottawa in March 1981, thousands of acid rain demonstrators booed his appearance on Parliament Hill. During his speech

to Parliament, NDP members wore black armbands to protest his policy on El Salvador. The next time he spoke to Parliament, in 1987, NDP MP Svend Robinson yelled, “Stop Star Wars!” Unruffled, Reagan replied that he felt right at home with a heckler.

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The two leaders, both of Irish descent, celebrated the new American-Canadian warmth when they sang “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” at the St. Patrick’s Day Shamrock Summit in Quebec City on March 17, 1985. Along with Margaret Thatcher’s Great Britain, the three leading English-speaking nations (Canada also being a French-speaking one, of course) were now led by conservative, market-oriented, capitalist revivalists. Controversial and confident, pragmatic but polarizing, the three leaders would help shift the ideological, political, social and economic centres of gravity in their respective countries, as well as worldwide.

Children of the provincial middle and lower classes, Thatcher, the grocer’s earnest daughter, and Mulroney, the electrician’s ambitious son, joined Reagan, the shoe salesman’s charming offspring, in a wide-ranging, plain-speaking, trendsetting assault on the Western elite’s big-government, union-friendly, high-tax, collectivist conventional wisdom. All three believed that the debate was not simply about



*Montreal Gazette archives*

Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the week-long Quebec Conference in August 1943. Hosting the wartime conference, and a second one at Quebec in 1944, put King and Canada on a global stage among what were then called “the Big Three.”

dollars and cents but about core values and common sense. None of them succeeded as dramatically as their supporters hoped or their opponents feared. Mulroney emerged as the most moderate, Thatcher as the most strident. All three, however, helped reorient the collective conversation from focusing on government solutions to the practical and philosophical consequences of relying on government handouts. All three also offered models of bold, symbolic, tone-setting leadership suited to the media realities of modern politics. At the same time, the three unintentionally demonstrat-

ed the broad social consensus supporting the liberal democratic social welfare state in Western countries as well as the structural and ideological forces fighting change but guaranteeing stability in their respective polities.

In October 1987, Mulroney and Reagan concluded the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, which was implemented on January 1, 1989, just weeks before Reagan left office. A decade later, a 10-year economic impact study by the Royal Bank of Canada found there had been an “explosion” of Canada-US trade, with Canadian exports to the US up

169 percent over the period, while imports increased by 137 percent, a clear win-win for both countries. In 2000, Pierre Pettigrew, then the trade minister, declared that exports had created 80 percent of the new jobs in Canada since the Liberals took office in 1993, and more than 80 percent of Canada’s exports were to the United States.

When Reagan died in June 2004, Mulroney became the first foreign leader in history to deliver a eulogy at the state funeral of a US president. The other two eulogies at Reagan’s funeral at the National Cathedral in

Washington were delivered by US presidents, both named Bush. Such was the nature of the relationship between Mulroney and Reagan.

After the FTA, Mulroney concluded the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the US and Mexico in 1992. This was one of two

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major agreements with the first president Bush, the other one being the Acid Rain Accord of 1991, which marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month. As Mulroney told the US Congress in a joint address in April 1988, he had negotiated a 50 percent reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions with the seven provinces east of Saskatchewan. "We ask nothing more than this from you," he said, noting that acid rain did not respect borders. "What would be said of a generation of Americans and Canadians who found a way to explore the stars," he continued, "but allowed its lakes and rivers and forests to languish and die?"

In office, Brian and Mila Mulroney often spent Labour Day weekend with George and Barbara Bush at their summer home at Walker's Point in Kennebunkport, Maine. It is a tradition that has continued practically down to this day.

With Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and President Bill Clinton in office, both countries shifted left — while remaining in sync with one another. Chrétien and Clinton struck a very different tone than Reagan and Mulroney. The two conservatives loved to give soaring addresses — intensifying the disappointment when they or their policies failed to measure up. Chrétien and Clinton practised a politics of the possible, of low expectations, of compromise, with both "le p'tit gars

de Shawinigan" and "Bubba" from Hope, Arkansas, as two small-town boys in the big city, in the major leagues of politics. Like Eisenhower and St-Laurent, Clinton and Chrétien shared a love of golf and became golfing buddies. Both played games in the mid-80s, though Clinton was known for taking so many takeovers, known as "mulli-

gans," that Chrétien took to calling them " Clintons."

As an intellectual, Clinton fit Canadians' idea of what a president should be. When he visited Ottawa in 1995, Clinton praised Canada as an example for the whole world "of how people of different cultures can live and work together in peace, prosperity and respect." Clinton — with help from his vice-president, Al Gore, and a bipartisan push from ex-presidents still alive — helped pass NAFTA in 1993, solidifying the gains from the Mulroney-Reagan/Bush years.

Clinton was very helpful to Chrétien in the 1995 Quebec referendum, a near-death experience for Canadian federalism. In October 1995, with the separatist forces on the move in the referendum campaign, the White House planted a question with a Canadian reporter, suggesting the President would welcome being asked his views at a news conference. While acknowledging that he wanted to be very careful about what he said, Clinton left no doubt where his preference lay, saying that the United States has always benefited from "a strong and united Canada." And in October 1999, after opening the new US embassy in Ottawa, Clinton did Chrétien another favour by extolling federalism as the wave of the future at the Mont Tremblant conference organized by the Forum of Federations, but essentially funded by

Ottawa. On both occasions, the Quebec sovereignty movement freaked out.

Moreover, Clinton, seductive and charismatic, was as popular in Canada as he was in the rest of the world. Chrétien — who was low-key even in Canada — had such a low profile that during the 2000 campaign to succeed Clinton, the comedian Rick Mercer tricked George W. Bush by telling him that Prime Minister Jean Poutine had endorsed him. Bush fell for the trick, saying: "I appreciate his strong statement; he understands I believe in free trade. He understands I want to make sure our relations with our most important neighbour to the north of us, the Canadians, is strong and we'll work closely together."

Unfortunately, Chrétien clashed with George W. Bush when he became president regarding the American plan to depose Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack against the US, Canadians embraced Americans warmly, and Chrétien soon agreed to send Canadian troops to fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan. But Chrétien tarried before visiting Ground Zero, and Bush overlooked Canada when thanking particular countries for their help in a major address to Congress after the attacks. These minor squabbles fed the bad blood over the Iraq War. Yet despite the tension — and the infamous moment when Chrétien's spokeswoman was caught calling President Bush "a moron" — the essential bond between the two countries remained strong.

This is the insight that has guided Stephen Harper, who has enjoyed warm relations with President Bush and President Obama. Harper has embraced a more Bush-style foreign policy approach, standing on principle even at the cost of popularity in the United Nations, particularly in his unstinting support of Israel. And

Harper has stood by the United States with the same ferocity with which Mulroney stood by Reagan. As Harper emphasized at his first summit with Bush in Cancún, “A threat to the United States is a threat to Canada, to our trade, to our interests, to our values and to our common civilization. Canada has no friends among

conference, with Obama saying he’d heard all about Harper’s garage band and its rendition of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash” going viral on the Internet.

There are two truths underlying these ups and downs. First, Canadians think a lot more about the US than American do about Canada, and are a lot

**Overall, Canada’s and America’s daily lives, at work or play, are more similar than different. Just as the technological, economic and media revolutions of the last few decades have minimized regional differences between the US North and the US South, or the Canadian East and the Canadian West, so, too, have these revolutions blurred Canadian-American differences.**

America’s enemies. And America has no better friend than Canada.” He repeated this statement, almost to the word, at his joint news conference with Obama last month.

President Obama got off to a rocky start with Canada, as with so many other American allies. In his worldwide apology tour in his first year in office, Obama had a tendency to slight America’s traditional friends while trying to woo American enemies like Iran. The Canadian leadership class and media bristled when Obama’s early economic initiatives looked protectionist and when his secretary of homeland security, Janet Napolitano, compared the Canadian border to the Mexican border, as if there was no difference between one of the world’s safest borders and a porous border absorbing drugs, weapons and illegal immigrants into the US.

Nevertheless, Obama’s charismatic “Yes We Can” campaign had made him tremendously popular with most Canadians and insulated him from these diplomatic tensions. Facing trouble in Afghanistan, a continuing terrorist threat and a shattered economy, Obama and Harper wanted to work together, and seem to have genuinely found common ground. By the time of their White House meeting in February of this year, they were calling each other “Barack” and “Stephen” at their news

more critical about American culture, politics, capitalism and foreign policy. Canada and the US have very different political cultures. Over the years, most US-Canadian controversies have dominated the Canadian media, engaged millions of Canadians and been ignored by most Americans.

The second and most important truth is that both countries fundamentally work together and share common values. Both countries are among the marvels of the post-Second World War world, wherein North America has become the model for the mass, middle-class, democratic civilization. In the 1920s, even before the Great Depression, most Americans and Canadians were poor, and far too many felt silenced or marginalized. That both countries now offer their citizens a high standard of living and a dazzling bouquet of freedoms is far too often taken for granted.

In recent years the world has learned that democracy entails more than occasional trips to the voting booth. In *The Case for Democracy*, former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky says a country is free if you can denounce the government loudly downtown, without suffering consequences. Both the United States and Canada pass the town square test — with a chaser: Not only can every citizen denounce the country freely, but most can then afford a three-course meal (or, more likely, grab a fast-food nibble).

Overall, Canada’s and America’s daily lives, at work or play, are more similar than different. Just as the technological, economic and media revolutions of the last few decades have minimized regional differences between the US North and the US South, or the Canadian East and the Canadian West, so, too, have these revolutions blurred Canadian-American differences.

This disconnect between the partisan shouting and clear battle lines of the media wars versus the quieter, homogenized realities of everyday North American life reflects how the culture wars and the political games play out in

both countries. Politics often takes an unnecessarily nasty turn, as activists and reporters overstate differences to seek the sharpest sound bite and the most hysterical headline.

The media tends to focus on personalities — emphasizing the chemistry between the presidents and the prime ministers. But over the decades it is clear that what really count are the many underlying bonds uniting the two countries in interlocking and overlapping ways, like a complex molecular structure. This is the story of North America, the extraordinary liberties and prosperity we should not take for granted — but enjoy daily.

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