



Canada as a Selective Power: Canada's Role and International Position after 1989

Marcin Gabryś and Tomasz Soroka

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A long time ago, back in 1980 when I began doing research for my thesis on Canada's relations with Eastern Europe at Carleton University in Ottawa, consulting the works of such scholars as James Eayrs, John W. Holmes, Adam Bromke and Peyton Lyon was prerequisite reading for any young academic writing on Canadian foreign policy. After reading *Canada as a Selective Power*, I would say that this is valuable reading for any scholar and expert writing on Canada's international relations today.

What makes this work special is that Professors Gabryś and Soroka are simultaneously dispassionate and passionate in their writing. They are dispassionate as Polish scholars who have produced an extensive, well-researched narrative on Canada's foreign relations in an analytical way, venturing their views without the inevitable bias a Canadian scholar might have difficulty avoiding. In their separate chapters on Canada's foreign policy under Prime Ministers Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau they lay everything out in a well-researched manner. They are passionate, however, in their genuine interest on the way both Canadians and non-Canadians see Canada's international relations and their passion in advancing their theory of Canada as a "selective power" since 1989.

In the Introduction the authors make it clear that because of its vast territory, abundant natural resources and economic importance, Canada is "too big to be disregarded" – while at the same time "the American factor" cannot be overlooked in the process of formulating and implementing Canadian foreign policy. However, Canadians and non-Canadians alike have too often focused on the "soft power" aspect of Canadian foreign policy, where being a peacekeeping nation exhorting humanitarian causes is often the global stereotype of Canada. Gabryś and Soroka, moreover, emphasize that the pre-1989 view of Canada as a "middle power" no longer applies since it had two "major" flaws: it exaggerated Canada's global influence while,



on the other hand, it downplayed Canada's significant accomplishments in key areas since the end of the Cold War.

Chapter 1 outlines three known theories of Canada's international relations. The first theory discussed is to see Canada as a "satellite" of the United States, a cynical notion I remember expounded by a few lecturers and students alike at Carleton. The authors themselves see this view as "pessimistic". The second theory sees Canada as a "major/foremost/principal" power. This reminds me of my childhood years when young pupils first learned about Sir Wilfred Laurier's boast that the "20th century belongs to Canada". This view the authors regard as the most optimistic and assertive approach of Canada. The third and most popular notion views Canada as being a "middle power" emphasizing multilateralism, internationalism and peacekeeping. All three concepts are summarized in a concise table (pp. 57–58) which shows their "strong" points but then highlights the "weak" points that lead all three theories to be seen as "outdated" by Gabryś and Soroka.

Chapter 2 outlines the view of the authors which sees Canada as a "selective" power. In comparison to "middle power" notions which view Canadian diplomacy as being "mission-oriented"; Canada as a "selective power" affirms a pragmatic, self-centered, objective-oriented approach to Canada's international relations that is the opposite of being a "middle power" which is supposed to be guided by less selfish motives. Naturally, this is a view that would make more idealistic and traditional Canadian experts in the area blush and protest too, as many of them actually did during the Harper years of Canadian foreign policy decision making.

The final two chapters deal with Canada as a selective power under Canada's most recent two Prime Ministers: Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau. Chapter 3 looks at Canada as selective power in the Harper era (2006–2015) in many areas such as the economy, environment, Arctic sovereignty, China, Israel, the United Nations, etc. Chapter 4 continues from the time of Justin Trudeau's sweeping election victory over the Harper Conservatives in the October 2015 federal election. The authors examine the Liberal campaign platform, which eviscerated the foreign policy of the Harper Conservatives and promised the return to "multilateralism" in areas such as the UN, environment, and military missions, among others. The irony is that Gabryś and Soroka's analysis shows that other than the rhetoric and international perceptions of Canada at international forums and in the media, Justin Trudeau's foreign policy is, overall, following the same selective approach of the Harper years.

These two young Polish scholars need to be highly commended for their exhaustive analysis and their innovative concepts on Canada's international relations. This book is cleanly written and provides the reader with interesting up-to-date facts about very recent Canadian political history. This writer and lecturer on the topic clearly will recommend his students at Masaryk University to read this very informative book.