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► **To cite this version:**

Laurence Cros. Canada's Entry in the Organization of American States: Change and Continuity in Canadian Identity. *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis*, 2012, 67 (3), pp.725-746. 10.1177/002070201206700310 . hal-01379528

**HAL Id: hal-01379528**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01379528>**

Submitted on 23 Oct 2021

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Laurence Cros

# Canada's entry into the OAS

*Change and continuity in Canadian identity*

Since the mid-1990s, identity has re-emerged as a key concept within international relations theory. The social constructivist view of international relations considers cultural variables, and particularly identity, as prime agents in states' decision-making. For constructivists, identity is "the core building block of interest, national or otherwise," and therefore they see national identity and the national interests that derive from it as central in state action<sup>1</sup>. In the case of Canada, the concept of identity was, in the past, central to the analysis of history. Until the 1960s, English-speaking Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Haglund, "And the Beat Goes On: 'Identity' and Canadian Foreign Policy," in Robert Bothwell and Jean Daudelin, eds., *Canada Among Nations, 2008: 100 Years of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 352.

historians incessantly pondered the nature of the country's national identity, and offered paradigms of historical interpretations that proposed powerful representations of Canadian identity. In more recent years, as the practice of history shifted from a national focus to topics in social history, the reflection on Canadian identity has been taken over by political scientists, and none more than the specialists of foreign policy, as Robert Bothwell recently pointed out: "An uncertain national identity has been, and remains, a major theme in Canadian history, and has been reflected in Canada's foreign relations."<sup>2</sup> In the case of Canada, choices in foreign policy have not only reflected current self-perceptions of the country; they have sometimes contributed to nation-building. Projecting a good image abroad is, for Canadians, a major preoccupation,<sup>3</sup> since Canada's international reputation can, to a certain degree, bolster its national identity.

This article is part of a wider project to examine the evolution of Canada's foreign policy in relation to the redefinition of its national identity from the end of the Second World War onwards. The issue of membership in the Organization of American States is particularly interesting because it seems to constitute a striking reorientation of Canada's foreign policy. It is linked to that other major change in Canada's international relations, the acceptance of free trade with the United States. The Free Trade Agreement of 1988, the entry in the OAS in 1990, and the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994, seem to symbolize the acceptance by Canada of a continental destiny that it had long refused.

This refusal had been expressed not only by several rejections of free trade with the United States, but also by the refusal to join the hemispheric institutions. The Pan-American Union was created in 1910, but Canada always refused to join, even after the Second World War, when the United States had become reconciled to Canada's membership and was even lobbying for it. Instead, Canada waited until 1990 to join the OAS, which raises the questions of why it waited so long, and why it changed its mind

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>3</sup> A recent poll conducted by Jean-Philippe Thérien and Gordon Mace has revealed that 80% of Canadians believe that the main priority of Canada's foreign policy in the Americas is to promote a good image of Canada. Jean-Philippe Thérien and Gordon Mace, "Le Canada et l'option des Amériques: Un projet inachevé," in Jean-Michel Lacroix and Gordon Mace, eds., *Politique étrangère comparée: Canada—États-Unis* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012), 119.

at this particular point in history. This question has been examined in a great many books and articles by Canadian scholars. Gordon Mace, in particular, has demonstrated convincingly that external factors—namely, the move towards regional economic blocks in the 1980s—are crucial to explain Canada's decision. Nonetheless, I would argue that internal factors, particularly Canada's evolving self-image and the new view of its place in the Americas that resulted from it, were also prime reasons behind Canada's entry in the OAS.

Change in self-perception is a key factor; but I will also show that this reorientation, striking as it was, took place within an unchanged framework, since one of Canada's key preoccupations while getting involved in the Americas was to pursue its long tradition of balancing US influence. In the post-Second World War period, this had been achieved by favouring Canada's participation in multilateral organizations, where it could find allies to counterbalance the overwhelming US power. Getting involved in the Americas was, as it were, a new tactic in Canada's long-term strategy of keeping Americanization at bay through multilateralism. Starting in the 1990s, both a reconstructed national identity, and new international elements, which I will examine, made it possible for Canada to carry out its traditional multilateral strategy in the new arena of the Americas.

I will argue that Canada's entry in the OAS was the result both of a changing national identity and of an unchanged international strategy, characterized by commitment to multilateralism to balance US influence.

#### PRE-OAS CANADA: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

In the period before the Second World War, Canada's membership in the Pan-American Union was strongly discouraged by the United States under the pretext that Canada was not a completely independent state and a republic, but in fact because the United States feared British interference in its hemispheric backyard. As late as 1942, the United States vetoed Canadian membership for this reason. But most importantly, the reason why Canada did not enter the Pan-American Union for so long is that it did not perceive itself as an American nation and did not identify the hemisphere as a key arena to express its international priorities. This was true both in the interwar period and in the 1940s and 1950s.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Britishness was still a fundamental facet of Canadian identity. William Lyon Mackenzie King, whose career as prime minister ended in November 1948, had always keenly defended Canada's autonomy, but there is no doubt about his passionate commitment to Britain.

Lester Pearson, who was secretary of state for external affairs (1948 to 1957) and the key figure of Canadian diplomacy in this period, was characterized by Britishness, a particular sort of Britishness that Canadian historian W.L. Morton defined as “a local brew which we called Canadian.”<sup>4</sup> Hence Canada was British, but with a local North American twist. As Robert Bothwell has recently written, it was “local and imperial, Canadian and British, with a strong American accent.”<sup>5</sup>

As Morton indicates, the British facet was multiple, made up of peoples from the four nations of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, along with some American contribution. Even the various twists to Canada’s British identity do not aptly represent that identity’s complexity. Of course, to this British-with-a-North-American-twist facet must be added the French facet of the Canadian identity. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Canada had a secretary of state for external affairs (Lester Pearson) who was a British Canadian with a strong Anglophile bias, along with a prime minister (Louis St. Laurent), who was a French Canadian. Ever since Confederation, the presence of the French Canadians has made it impossible to define Canada solely as British—despite recurrent efforts by the Anglophone majority to assimilate or constrain the Francophone minority.

By the 1920s, following the great trauma of conscription during the First World War, Canadian thinkers were beginning to praise this dual dimension of the country. They rejected John Stuart Mill’s definition of a nation-state based on an identity of race and a community of language and religion. They preferred Lord Acton’s definition of the ideal nationality as heterogeneous and ethnically diverse, because such a state is, by necessity, forced to compromise and therefore is less likely to become intolerant. For example, in the 1920s, constitutional historian W.P.M. Kennedy wrote that:

It would be well indeed if we could grasp the idea that a state which is nationally homogeneous is perhaps in a less fortunate position than a state which contains two or more heterogeneous national

4 “The English Canadian is American, Scots, Irish, or northern English, to a far greater degree than southern or dominant English.... Our Britishness, then, was not Englishness, but a local brew of our own which we called Canadian.... We were British in sentiment, but we were, in fact, North American.” W. L. Morton, “The Dualism of Culture and the Federalism of Power” [1964], A. B. McKillop, ed., *Contexts of Canada’s Past: Selected Essays of W. L. Morton* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980), 257.

5 Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion*, 5.

elements. A nation which coincides with the state is too liable to become intolerant, to make nationalism the basis of the state; but the state in which there is a variety of national feeling is forced to learn in the school of experience lessons which will prove useful in world issues.<sup>6</sup>

To what extent did this complex Canadian identity influence the country's choices in foreign policy? Ever since the First World War, the first preoccupation of Canadian foreign policy had been to find a common ground for the two "races," as they were still called. Certainly the guiding principle of Mackenzie King's foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s had been to avoid antagonizing the French Canadians, which led him to downplay the British connection. After the war, seeking harmony between the two groups to preserve national unity remained a central principle of Canadian foreign policy, as shown by Prime Minister Saint Laurent's famous Gray lecture in 1947.

The other equally important priority of Canadian foreign policy stemmed from its British-with-a-North-American-twist identity, and that was to maintain a fine balance between British and American influences. Canada's British identity was important not only in itself but also as a counterweight to US influence. For most of Canada's history, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Canada's single international strategy was to play Britain against the United States, to protect itself from Americanization, i.e. subjection to US culture, and even annexation to the United States. This was achieved by relying on Canada's British identity and Canada's connection to British power. Later, variations to the game were introduced. In the 1920s and 1930s, when Canada was busy winning its diplomatic independence from Britain, it was tempted to downplay its British connections and to emphasize its hemispheric nature. This tendency was embodied by O.D. Skelton, a crucial actor of Canada's external affairs in the pre-Second World War period, who was tempted by continentalism and isolationism.

Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King was also eager to promote Canada's independence from Britain, but still very much attached to Canada's British dimension. Hence Canada began to express in that period a vision that would come to full fruition after the Second World War—that of the North Atlantic triangle. In this paradigm, Canada plays the role of the

6 W.P.M. Kennedy, "Nationalism and Self-determination," *Canadian Historical Review* 2 (1921): 17.

linchpin, the interpreter between Britain and the United States. This was aptly expressed by Vincent Massey, Canada's first ambassador to the United States: "I did not take long to find that Canada had a rather special although unobtrusive role to play in Washington as an occasional intermediary between Great Britain and the United States."<sup>7</sup>

But after the Second World War, Canada's simple strategy of balancing Britain and the United States no longer worked. As British power decreased, Britain was no longer able to act as a counterweight to the United States. Canada's new diplomatic strategy was to favour multilateral organizations. This was a choice born out of realism, as best suited to Canada's particular position in the international hierarchy of nations. Activism in multilateral organizations would give Canada the chance to play a more important role in the world than its real power entailed. This was the "middle power" strategy so skilfully carried out by Lester Pearson in the post-1945 period. As American power waxed, and its embrace on Canada tightened, multilateral organizations came to provide the counterweight Britain could no longer provide.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore it can be argued, as many analysts have done, that Canada's support of multilateralism was not motivated by altruism or idealism, but by stark realism. Indeed, David Haglund has demonstrated that the counterweight metaphor in the analysis of Canadian foreign policy is squarely based on the realist approach, since it logically proceeds from the premise that states' foreign policies are dictated by relative capability. The counterweight strategy is thus Canada's attempt to give itself some maneuvering room to deal with its much more powerful neighbour and principal trade partner.<sup>9</sup>

Using the social constructivism approach, it can also be demonstrated that multilateralism was a choice that stemmed from Canada's national identity. As we have seen, Canada's identity was in fact far more complex and diverse than the simple identification with Britishness allows. This

7 Vincent Massey, *What's Past Is Prologue: the Memoirs of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), 157.

8 Tom Keating, *Canada and World Order: The Multilateral Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

9 David Haglund and Onea Tudor, "Sympathy for the Devil: Myths of Neoclassical Realism in Canadian Foreign Policy," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 14, no. 2 (spring 2008): 63-65.

heterogeneous nature of Canadian national identity<sup>10</sup> was perceived as early as the 1920s as an element that predisposed Canada to do well in multilateral institutions. The same thinkers who had started to theorize that a heterogeneous state was preferable because it was more predisposed to tolerance, also promoted a model of multilateral internationalism in which states would enjoy only relative sovereignty—a model that was embodied in the League of Nations and seen as conducive to peace in the world.<sup>11</sup>

When Canada actively engaged in the creation of the United Nations in 1945, it already had behind it a tradition of thinking well of multilateralism and of linking it—in a flattering way—to its own heterogeneous national identity. Within the United Nations, Canadians quickly developed a role that suited the national myths held by both national groups: they acted as peacekeepers and mediators. As Massie and Roussel have very aptly demonstrated, these interrelated roles developed as national myths that reinforced national unity in Canada<sup>12</sup>. This was based on the conviction that Canada's national identity was characterized by tolerance for diversity and a particular aptitude for compromise and negotiation. This idea functions as a virtuous circle: because they are supposedly experts at reconciling differences at home, Canadians are perceived as ideal agents for mediation and peacekeeping in international relations. And on the other hand, the Canadian people, both Anglophones and Francophones, are proudly convinced of their own tolerance and talent for accommodation because the world has long accepted Canada's expertise in peacekeeping and mediation.

It seems, then, that Canada's preference for multilateralism after 1945 was not only a realist calculation to exert more influence in international relations, but also reinforced cherished beliefs about Canadian national identity. One set of beliefs was the recognition of Canada's heterogeneous

10 I would like to note that I do not consider Canada to have been a multicultural country in the modern sense in 1947. Indeed, Canada's domestic policies were then still characterized by racial discrimination against Asians, including Indians and Pakistanis, whose immigration was severely restricted until 1962. Canadians of Asian origin had only limited citizenship rights, especially in British Columbia, until 1947. In short, Canadian identity, while not monolithic, remained essentially western and North Atlantic-British (with its four-nation character), French, and North American.

11 W.P.M. Kennedy, *The Constitution of Canada* (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 455-456.

12 Justin Massie and Stéphane Roussel, "Au service de l'unité: Le rôle des mythes en politique étrangère canadienne," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 14, no. 2 (spring 2008): 80-84.



dimension and the view that heterogeneity gave Canada a particular expertise as “fixer” in international relations. This set of beliefs was primarily enacted in the United Nations. The other set of beliefs, which was somewhat at odds with the first, was the survival of the older, traditional British definition of the Canadian identity. Apart from the United Nations, the regional organization in which Canada felt most at ease to enact its multilateral strategy was not the Pan-American Union (whose new avatar was the Organization of the American States, founded in 1948), but the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NATO was the multilateral regional organization most in harmony with Canada’s traditional identity. It was like a family that included both of Canada’s mother countries, Britain and France, and its North American sibling, the US. It perfectly matched Canada’s identity of the late 1940s and 1950s—Atlantic, western European, and North American. Both French and English Canadians could feel comfortable with NATO, which met the objective of preserving national unity. NATO was, as it were, the multilateral translation of the old Canadian metaphor of the North Atlantic triangle. Within NATO, Canada could continue to balance US influence with British power (now expanded into western European power, including a French dimension) as it had learned to do in the past, and it could continue to play the role of linchpin or helpful fixer it had begun to elaborate in the 1930s. NATO provided a safe psychological environment in which Canada’s international role rested on the same national identity as before. This was clearly summed up by Lester Person:

[I]n contrast with the Pan American Union, for example, [the North Atlantic community] reflects political, economic and cultural interests which in the history of Canada have been of importance in the growth of its freedom and security.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of identity, it was clear that the Pan-American Union was the wrong arena for Canada to enact its multilateral strategy, since it was completely at odds with Canada’s complex identity of a local North American brew of Britishness with a dash of Frenchness. Neither could it serve the goal of providing a counterweight to the United States, because it was, far more than NATO, completely under US domination.

13 L.B. Pearson, “Canada and the North Atlantic Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs* 28 (1948-1949): 374.

THE 1970S AND 1980S: CHANGING NATIONAL IDENTITY, CHANGING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

*From "Britishness with a twist" to Multiculturalism*

Canada's choice to become a full-time player in the Americas was not only a response to external economic factors. It was also a response to a changed perception of Canadian identity. While the late 1980s is the moment when the Canadian government accepted the "continental" destiny of the country, in fact the transformation that made this decision possible had begun long before.

It would seem self-evident that the Americas were, indeed, Canada's natural home; however, as we have seen, Canada's home until the 1960s was the British world. In other words, Canada long favoured its historical roots over its geographical roots. Between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, however, Canada's self-perception as a British-European, North Atlantic country slowly weakened, thus removing the psychological block that had prevented Canada from acknowledging itself as an American country. It was a slow and subterranean change that started in the late 1960s. By then, the solid foundation of the old Canadian identity, its "British with a twist" anchor, was fast slipping away. This was due to two factors, both internal and external: the internal factor was that Canada, through demographic changes and immigration, was starting to become less and less British; the external factor was that British power, which had been on the wane since the Second World War, continued to decrease, and that British attention turned more and more away from the Atlantic world. By the 1970s, Britain was seeking entry into the European Economic Community. Its focus on the North Atlantic world was lessening. This had consequences both on Canada's national identity and on its international strategy.

The importance of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's influence on the reorientation of Canadian identity beginning in the late 1960s cannot be underestimated. Trudeau promoted the multicultural model, a model that corresponded to the changing character of the Canadian population. In the long term, Canada's acceptance of its hemispheric destiny was facilitated by multiculturalism, and by the Caribbean and Latin American group within the Canadian population that slowly grew after immigration laws were changed to remove preferences for European immigrants.

In the 1960s, Canada slowly began to change its policies to promote acceptance of diversity. In August 1960, Parliament passed a bill of rights "for the recognition and protection of human rights...without discrimination for reasons of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex." In July 1960, all

native Canadians were enfranchised. But the key change was the adoption of the 1967 Immigration Act, which abolished the former preferential treatment, so that immigrants were no longer selected according to their ethnic origin. In 1969, Parliament passed the Official Languages Act, which made Canada officially bilingual. In 1971, Trudeau's government promulgated the "Announcement of Implementation of Policy of Multiculturalism within Bilingual Framework," the precursor of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988.

As we know, Trudeau's twin policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism were designed not only to accommodate the new immigrants, but also to answer the French Canadians' demand for more equality within the Canadian federation and therefore alleviate the threat of Quebec separatism. But whatever the motivations, they fostered new views of the national identity of Canada. Canadian thinkers came up with the notion of "limited identities," i.e., the possibility that Canadian citizens should define themselves through diverse experiences of region, class, and culture.<sup>14</sup> In addition, they took up the reflection of their predecessors of the 1920s and rejected the ethnic model of the nation in favour of the heterogeneous and ethnically diverse Actonian model. There is an obvious convergence between the concept of "limited identities" and the Actonian model, which transforms the multiplicity of identities available to the Canadian citizens from a weakness into an asset. In a world that is more and more transnational and global, Canada becomes a model.

In this context, it was not only possible but beneficial for a Caribbean and Latin American dimension to develop within the new multicultural Canada. Immigration from the Americas, virtually inexistent before the reform of immigration, came first from countries that had already established links with Canada through the Commonwealth and the Francophonie—the Anglophone Caribbean, especially Jamaica, and Haiti. As to Latin Americans, their first choice of immigration was naturally the United States, which already had large Hispanic communities. As a result, Latin American migration to Canada really started when the reasons for immigration became political rather than economic, and when access to the United States was restricted.<sup>15</sup> Hence Canada welcomed over 7,000 Chilean

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Careless, "Limited Identities' in Canada," in Carl Berger, ed., *Contemporary Approaches to Canadian History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1987), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Alan B. Simmons, "Canada and Migration in the Western Hemisphere" in Jerry Haar and Edgar J. Dosman, eds., *A Dynamic Partnership: Canada's Changing Role in the Americas* (Coral Gables: University of Miami North-South Center, 1993), 55.

refugees in the years that followed the Pinochet coup in 1973, thus becoming the largest provider of asylum in the world for them. In the mid 1980s, Canada became home to many Central American refugees fleeing from the Contra/Sandinista conflict.<sup>16</sup> From 1966 to 1989, when Canada decided to enter the OAS, some 250,000 immigrants originated from the Caribbean (with Jamaica and Haiti as the main source countries) and some 210,000 immigrants came from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Since the 1970s, Caribbean and Latin American migrants have represented around 10 per cent of all immigrants to Canada.<sup>17</sup>

There can be no doubt that the new immigration and the policy of multiculturalism, which encouraged immigrants to retain the cultural traits of their homes, had an impact on the Canadian identity. Of course it was a long process, not a brutal shift. Slowly, new layers were added. Old layers did not disappear, but sank out of view into the sediments of the past. While Canada's "British" identity was not brutally erased, it slowly receded. This made the priority given by Canada to the North Atlantic world less self-evident and natural. For the new Canadians, the idea of Canadians being a "local brew" of a global Britishness made no sense at all. The new Latin American and Caribbean Canadians must have felt more cultural affinities to Latin America, and Canada's activity in hemispheric affairs and institutions would have seemed natural.<sup>18</sup> Indeed when Canada finally joined the OAS in 1990, the metaphors that appeared in official speeches were those of the family and the home, which for most of Canada's existence had been reserved to Britain and the British world. Even in the 1960s, it would have been inconceivable for a Canadian minister to declare, "For too long, Canadians have seen this hemisphere as our house; it is now time to make it our home."<sup>19</sup> But by 1989, Canadian multiculturalism had been at work for twenty years, and Canada was no longer British, not even a local brew. This slow evolution in

16 James Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas: The Evolution of Canadian Foreign Policy Towards Latin America* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 103-105 and 158-159.

17 Figures compiled from immigration statistics from 1966 to 1989. Citizenship and Immigration statistics archives (1966 to 1996), [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca). See also "2006 Census: Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-born Population, 2006 Census: Data tables, figures and maps," figure 2, [www12.statcan.ca](http://www12.statcan.ca).

18 Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), *Toward a New World Strategy: Canadian Policy in the Americas into the 21st century* (Ottawa: FOCAL Papers, 1994), 12.

19 Notes for Remarks by the Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, at the Meeting of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, Washington, 13 November 1989, 1.

Canada's self perception, which began in the 1970s, is a key long-term factor in the reorientation towards the Americas. As the special joint committee on Canada's international relations stated in 1986 after conducting a thorough review of how Canadians felt about foreign policy, "the multicultural character of Canada has...affected the foreign policy agenda."<sup>20</sup> The impact of external pressures that pushed Canada to turn to the Americas was greatly enhanced by the ongoing shift from a "British" identity to a multicultural identity with a strong Latin American and Caribbean element.

### *Trudeau and the reorientation of Canada's international priorities*

When the Trudeau government came to power, it launched a re-examination and a reorientation of Canada's foreign policy. The 1970 review of foreign policy argued that in a world characterized by *détente* and European integration, Canada's commitment to NATO was obsolete—an analysis that had been announced by Trudeau's decision in May 1968 to cut Canadian military presence in Europe by half. But several stable elements remained. The first one was that the key priority of Canada's foreign policy remained unchanged, and it was to "safeguard independence and sovereignty," especially *vis-à-vis* the United States in the context of the Vietnam War, which increased Canadian resentment of US power.

Secondly, the strategy chosen to reach this end remained unchanged, as Canada remained committed to multilateralism; but in terms of regional multilateral partners, the review suggested that it was time to shift from Europe to the western hemisphere. The 1970 review for the first time articulated the idea that Canada was an American country and should therefore redirect its international strategy towards the hemispheric arena. As a manifestation of this growing interest in the Americas, the 1970 review recommended that a formal link be established with the OAS. This was done in 1972 when Canada became a permanent observer in the OAS.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Canada sought to develop commercial ties with Latin America as part of the Third Option. In his 1972 article, Secretary of State for External Affairs Mitchell Sharp acknowledged the profound US influence on Canada, and most of all the dangerous dependence of the Canadian economy on US investment and trade. To counter this, he proposed "the active pursuit of trade diversification...with countries other than the United

<sup>20</sup> *Final Report, Independence and Internationalism*, Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations, Ottawa, 1986, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Foreign Policy for Canadians, vol. 1* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1970): 5-39.

States.”<sup>22</sup> While Sharp's article did not identify which countries Canada could turn to, it later became clear that Canada was hoping to increase its trade with Japan and the EEC. But Latin America was also considered as a potential economic partner. In 1968, Canada had sent its largest ministerial mission ever to Latin America, and its primary concern had been trade and investment. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, trade and investment in Latin America steadily increased.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore in the 1970s, Canada began reorienting itself towards the Americas. One might wonder, then, why the Trudeau government did not go all the way and join the OAS? Why did Canada decide not to go beyond permanent observer status? One reason was the lack of prestige of the OAS as a regional multilateral organization in the 1970s and especially in the early 1980s. The OAS seemed an ineffective and increasingly irrelevant organization in that period. It proved unable to help solve major debt crises in Mexico and elsewhere. It was weakened by the Falklands War, when American support for Britain demonstrated that the US still favoured its North Atlantic links over its hemispheric partners. During the Contra/Sandinista conflict, the OAS could not even provide a meeting ground to broker peace between warring Central American nations.<sup>24</sup>

But the most important reason for Canada's reluctance to enter the OAS was that it could not play the traditional role that Canada expected from multilateral institutions—it could not act as a counterweight to US power. The Americas had traditionally been the United States' backyard, but this became even truer in the Cold War period. From the Cuban missile crisis in the early 1960s to the Nicaraguan revolution in the mid-1980s, the United States' priority in the Americas was to hold back communism, and it expected complete support of the OAS for this purpose. Therefore membership in the OAS could not act as a counterweight to US influence; on the contrary, membership in the OAS, where a two-third majority compelled all members to comply with a resolution, would have prevented Canada from following

22 Mitchell Sharp, “Canada-US Relation: Options for the future,” *International Perspectives* (autumn 1972): 22.

23 Gordon Mace and Jean-Philippe Thérien, *Foreign Policy and Regionalism in the Americas* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 57-58; Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas*, 75-76.

24 Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas*, 134-135; and Peter McKenna, *Canada and the OAS* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 112 and 128.

a distinct foreign policy. This was pointed out by the 1970 review as a key factor that prevented Canada from joining the OAS.<sup>25</sup>

And indeed, as its foreign policy towards Cuba proved, Canada had a distinct interpretation of the significance of communism in the Americas. Contrary to the United States, Canada did not systematically see Soviet influence at work when socialist or communist regimes emerged in the Americas. Canada believed that north-south disparities, internal poverty, and economic inequities were the main factors behind the emergence of those regimes. Therefore it did not agree with the US remedy: military intervention or economic sanctions would only worsen the poverty that had given birth to those regimes<sup>26</sup>. Since Canada did not see socialism or even communist regimes in the Americas as the expression of a foreign threat, it was ready to accept ideological diversity in the hemisphere. This view was encapsulated in Canada's decision to maintain its diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba in 1964, and it was still true at the time of the Sandinistas' revolution in the early 1980s, when it was expressed once more by Trudeau:

In our view states have the right to follow whatever ideological path their peoples decide. When a country chooses a socialist or even a Marxist path, it does not necessarily buy a package which automatically injects it into the Soviet orbit. The internal systems adopted by countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, whatever these systems may be, do not in themselves pose a security threat to this hemisphere.<sup>27</sup>

It seems clear then that in the context of the Cold War, Canadian political distinctiveness could only be expressed outside the OAS. Rather than act as a counterweight to US influence, membership in the OAS would have

25 *Foreign Policy for Canadians*, vol. 1, 29; *Foreign Policy for Canadians*, vol. 4 (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1970), 23.

26 Canada's view was expressed in *Canada's Relations with Latin America and the Caribbean*, a 1983 report of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence; the United States' view was expressed by the 1984 *Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*. Analyses of both reports appear in Jonathan Lemco, *Canada and the Crisis in Central America* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 16-17; and Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas*, 114-116.

27 Remarks made by Prime Minister Trudeau at the Heads of Government Meeting of the Commonwealth Caribbean and Canada, St. Lucia, 20 February 1983. Quoted in Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas*, 118-119.

sharply curtailed Canada's opportunity to distinguish itself from US policy. This explains that despite Canada's increasing interest in the Americas—the result both of Canada's changing national identity and of external political factors—the OAS could not yet become a new arena for Canada to carry out its multilateral strategy to balance American influence.

#### CANADA WITHIN THE OAS: A NEW ARENA FOR THE LONG FIGHT AGAINST AMERICANIZATION?

##### *The Free Trade Agreement and Canada's entry in the OAS: convergence or counterweight?*

It is striking that Canada should have joined the OAS within a year of signing a free trade agreement with the United States. Both moves had been resisted for almost a century, in great part because of the fear that they would lead not only to economic integration with the United States, but also to political subjection. Symbolically, taken together, they could be seen as a signal that Canada was abandoning the fight to maintain a separate identity on the American continent. On the other hand, it was maybe possible to see entry in the OAS as a move to ensure that economic integration with the United States would not lead to political integration. This would work if Canadian contribution to the OAS allowed it to distinguish itself from the US model; it would then be a re-enactment of the old strategy of using multilateral organizations as a counterweight to US influence.

The decision by the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney to join the OAS may be interpreted as a natural outcome of the continentalist drift symbolized by the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement. And indeed, since the first announcement was made while Brian Mulroney was vacationing with President Bush, it was easy to jump to the conclusion that Canada was simply bowing to US wishes. However, as Peter McKenna has shown, the decision was based on a thorough internal review of Canada's relations with Latin America conducted by the Department of External Affairs from 1988 to 1989. Canada's new strategy was to use membership in the OAS to further the development of democracy and the pursuit of economic prosperity within the region. The Department of External Affairs had completely reversed its opinion since 1983, when it had advised the government not to join, because it believed that the dynamics of hemispheric affairs changed and the influence of the United States in the OAS declined. The Department of External Affairs analysis was consistent with Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark's desire to see Canada play a greater role in Latin America. Canada was being pushed in that direction by the emergence of regional



blocs in the world; and Clark felt it was a good opportunity for Canada to increase its influence in the world through “constructive internationalism,” a strategy defined in the wake of the 1986 foreign policy review and that echoed Canada’s “middle power” multilateral posture of the 1950s.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore entry in the OAS was envisaged as a new contribution to the traditional multilateral model favoured by Canada. The OAS was to be a new multilateral institution that would enhance Canada’s reputation and its role in the world. The OAS would begin to work more effectively thanks to Canada’s expertise, born out of long years of commitment to multilateralism—a commitment at which Canada excelled because it suited its experience of constructing a coherent national identity out of heterogeneous elements through a process of compromise and accommodation. In other words, while the Conservatives had agreed to economic integration with the United States through the Free Trade Agreement, they still hoped, through membership in the OAS, to counterbalance US power, and more precisely to contain the evolution throughout the hemisphere towards a hub-and-spokes system centered on the United States.<sup>29</sup>

As McKenna has pointed out, this view of Canadian membership in the OAS only increased when the Liberals returned to power in 1993: hemispheric multilateralism would be used as a counterweight to balance the relation with the United States.<sup>30</sup> In the past twenty years, this has led Canada to a double approach to hemispheric affairs: in North America, Canada tends to accept the reality of interdependence and US primacy; in Latin America, it attempts to develop a distinct leadership.<sup>31</sup>

Hence starting in 1990 with Canada’s entry in the OAS, commitment to the hemisphere was no longer automatically equated to commitment to the United States. On the contrary, Canada tried to play a stronger role in the Americas in the hope that it would strengthen its distinctiveness from the United States.

28 McKenna, *Canada and the OAS*, 131-139.

29 Gordon Mace, “L’Adhésion du Canada à l’OÉA: La primauté des facteurs externes,” *Études internationales* 31, no. 2 (June 2000): 265-266.

30 McKenna, *Canada and the OAS*, 170.

31 Teresa Gutiérrez-Haces, “La Politique extérieure du Canada: entre la nord-américanisation et la latino-américanisation,” in Gérard Boismenu and Jean-Michel Lacroix, eds., *Les Enjeux de la politique étrangère canadienne* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008), 152.

*Canada in the Americas: a new arena for an old strategy*

When Canada entered the OAS, it had long pursued an international strategy of multilateralism as a counterweight to US influence; what was new in 1990 was the possibility that this strategy could be pursued within the hemispheric arena. Since the 1970s, the redefinition of Canada's self-perception had been accompanied by the underlying assumption that the Americas could logically become a new arena for Canada. But it took the end of the Cold War to make it possible for Canada to enter the OAS without becoming totally aligned on US views and methods. The end of the Cold War meant that Canada was under far less pressure to conform to US policy in the Americas: as Rochlin aptly remarked, "The OAS may now be seen as the political institution of the Americas during a process of integration, rather than as an instrument for US contestation against international communism."<sup>32</sup>

Canada's decision to enter the OAS was therefore both a revolution and the continuation of a tradition. Multilateralism, as the cornerstone of Canada's international strategy, provided an element of stability and continuity in this new commitment to hemispheric institutions.

The attempt to balance bilateral satellization to the United States through a multilateral commitment to the Americas would work by increasing Canada's international status, but most importantly, it would work if Canada's activism in the OAS were used to underline intrinsic differences with the United States. And indeed, the Americas seemed a promising area to do this, after a century of US unilateralism, military interventions and economic exploitation, through practices that had ranged from Teddy Roosevelt's Big Stick policy to Ronald Reagan's support to the Contras. By contrast, Canada could express in the OAS its own approach to international relations, based on the preference for multilateral rather than unilateral decisions, on the method of speaking quietly and brokering compromise and accommodation, and on the desire to promote democracy and prosperity for all. Canada's action in the OAS, therefore, could provide a striking illustration of how different Canada was from the United States.

And indeed, throughout the 1990s Canada was very active within the OAS to promote democracy and what Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy called "human security," an ideal that included defence of human rights, socio-economic development, protection of the environment, and

32 Rochlin, *Discovering the Americas*, 200.

containment of narcotics traffic. Canada's first initiative in the OAS was the creation of the unit for the promotion of democracy, which was tasked with monitoring elections. The unit was very active throughout the 1990s. Its role culminated with the 2000 crisis in Peru, when President Fujimori illegally sought a third mandate. The unit was instrumental in alerting the OAS; Canada convinced the OAS to send a mission, which was headed by Lloyd Axworthy and OAS Secretary General César Gaviria. It was an extremely effective mission that established innovative forms of democratic dialogue with societal actors. The mission led to a call for a democratic charter by former UN secretary Javier Pérez de Cuellar, the foreign minister in the transitional Peruvian government.

The 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec took up the call for a democratic charter in its declaration, and the charter was finally signed on the very day of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Canada's activism in promoting democracy in the Americas was an example of Canada's successful and distinctive leadership in the OAS. Canada helped to introduce an effective type of multilateralism in the region—quiet, innovative, based on negotiations and compromise, allowing participation from the civil society, characterized by a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. These qualities appeared in the preparation of the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec, which encouraged citizen participation. Canada not only assumed leadership on the question of democracy, but also encouraged secondary powers like Peru to actively participate and take leadership in the process.

Canada's accomplishments in promoting democracy in the Americas could therefore be presented as the manifestation of a model that distinguished Canada from the United States. As Lloyd Axworthy proudly stated, "We had in the Peru crisis an opportunity to step forward and fill a role that was not within the ken of the US, but enjoyed their support—demonstrating that one can be good ally often by playing an independent role."<sup>33</sup> The statement clearly underlines that the Canadian government felt

33 Lloyd Axworthy, "A Model for promoting democracy in the Americas," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 10, no. 3 (spring 2003): 14. See also on this topic: Stephen J. Randall, "In Search of a Hemispheric Role: Canada and the Americas," in Norman Hillmer and Maureen Appel Molot, eds., *Canada Among Nations 2002: A Fading Power* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 233-234 and 243-249; Andrew F. Cooper, "Ownership and the Canadian Model of New Multilateralism: Negotiating the inter-American Democratic Charter," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 10, no. 3 (spring 2003): 35-37 and 40-41; Marc Lortie and Sylvie Bedard, "Citizen involvement in Canadian foreign policy: the

the OAS (and more generally, the Americas) had fulfilled its promise as an international arena in which to demonstrate Canada's distinctiveness from the US. Whether or not Canadian policy in the Americas in the late 1990s was different from the US approach is debatable, since the US at the time was defending the same objectives. Nevertheless, events like the Peru crisis gave Canada an opportunity to promote itself—to the world and to its own citizens—as the better and more authentic champion of democracy.

It was in the interest of the government of Canada to promote its expertise and leadership in the OAS, not only as a way to demonstrate Canada's distinctiveness, but also as an instrument to strengthen national unity. Indeed, Denis Saint Martin has recently argued that the Canadian foreign policy of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin was part of a Liberal strategy mainly designed for internal consumption and meant to strengthen national unity in the face of North American integration and renewed Quebec separatism.<sup>34</sup> But if Canada's foreign policy, including its new activism in the OAS, could be instrumental in this way, it was precisely because Canadians shared a certain idea of who they were and what role their country should play in the world. Central to this representation was that the belief that multilateralism should be Canada's preferred approach to international relations, along with the expression in the world of Canada's multiculturalist values of respecting diversity and encouraging compromise and accommodation.

This was accompanied by the strong belief that through this method, Canada could do a lot of good in the world—not a specifically Liberal representation of the Canadian identity. As reviews of Canadian foreign policy reveal, this view was promoted by both Conservative and Liberal governments and seems to have been embraced by the Canadian people. For example, a 1986 report based of hundred of messages and interviews from Canadian citizens and associations by the special joint committee on Canada's international relations noted that Canadians called “for a more significant human rights component in Canadian foreign policy” and felt “very much at home in the area of international co-operation. Here is where Canada's traditions, efforts and experience reside.” As a result, the report recommended that Canadian foreign policy should be conducted through “constructive internationalism.”

summit of the Americas experience 2001,” *International Journal* 57, no. 3 (summer 2002): 323-339.

34 Denis Saint Martin, “La politique étrangère des libéraux au Canada,” in Boisjoly and Lacroix, eds., *Les Enjeux de la politique étrangère canadienne*, 39-45.

This recommendation was “warmly” endorsed by the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney.<sup>35</sup> In 2003, the Liberal government of Paul Martin launched a dialogue on foreign policy, which produced a report heavily quoted from dialogue participants. One quote fully expressed this idealized view of Canada’s identity at home and abroad:

Our domestic values of multiculturalism, bilingualism, federalism, and our commitment to strive—even though we often fall short—toward tolerance as a society, are ones that we should be proud of internationally. These values translate well into what I believe should be Canada’s primary underlying value in foreign policy, which is the value of multilateralism and the development of international institutions for security, human rights, environmental protection, and fair trade.<sup>36</sup>

Canada’s entry in the OAS in 1990, while encouraged by external factors, was also facilitated by this dominant view of the national identity. It also inspired and legitimized Canada’s activism in the OAS in the 1990s and early 2000s, through the central idea that Canada had managed to build a democratic, peaceful, and equal society despite the diversity of the Canadian peoples, and, as a result, that it was particularly well-equipped to teach the OAS how to further democracy and good governance in the Americas.

#### CONCLUSION

Canada’s entry into the OAS marked a key evolution of Canada’s foreign policy. One central element of Canada’s reluctance to enter the OAS in the past was Canada’s lack of affinity with the hemisphere at a time when its identity was primarily North Atlantic rather than “American.” The second element was the fear of jeopardizing the already minute distinctiveness that separated Canada from the United States.

Recent surveys show that today, Canadians still feel that Canada is closer in values and goals to the US or the UK than to Latin American countries. Nonetheless, they view Latin America as almost as important as Europe to

<sup>35</sup> *Final Report, Independence and Internationalism* (Ottawa: Special Joint Committee on Canada’s International Relations, 1986), 15, 39, 139; *Canada’s International Relations: Response of the Government of Canada to the Report of the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons* (Ottawa: Department of External Affairs, 1986), 89.

<sup>36</sup> *A Dialogue on Foreign Policy: Report to Canadians* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2003), 5.

advance Canada's national interests. These findings were confirmed by a January 2011 Ipsos Reid survey commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which revealed that about 84 percent of Canadians surveyed said that what happens in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean is important to Canada (as compared to 82 percent in a similar survey in 2008).<sup>37</sup> While Canadians' identification with the Americas remains weak, or at least weaker than that with North America or the North Atlantic area, there is a growing awareness that the Americas is an important region for Canada.

One could argue that this evolving position comes in part from the gradual realization that involvement in the Americas need not automatically lead to increasing US dominance, but on the contrary, that involvement in the Americas could work to increase Canada's distinctiveness. In other words, acceptance of Canada's "American-ness" (in the sense used by Latin Americans, who object to the term "American" being used to qualify the United States, rather than the Americas as a whole) can act as a counterweight to Americanization (in the sense of coming under US influence).

This idea was first developed by French Canadians, who seem, on the whole, more comfortable with the notion of Canada as an "American" nation:

Cela tend à montrer non seulement qu'américanité n'est pas symbole d'acculturation étasunienne, mais que la reconnaissance, par les Québécois, de *leur* américanité pourrait bien venir prendre le relais de la référence européenne à titre de contre-offensive implicite à l'« américanisation » (...).<sup>38</sup>

This is sustained by a poll conducted by Gordon Mace and Jean-Philippe Thérien in 2010, which revealed that Canadian citizens who wish Canada to develop stronger links with the Americas are not in favour of stronger links with the United States.<sup>39</sup> This result seems to support the idea that Canadians realize that involvement in the Americas as a whole does not mean the same thing at all as involvement with the United States. On the

<sup>37</sup> *Canadian Perceptions of Latin America and the Caribbean Survey Report* (Ottawa: Canadian Foundation for the Americas, 2007), 2-7; Laura Baziuk, "Recent Government Efforts Fail to Engage Canadians in Activities in Americas," *Postmedia News*, 22 July 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Léon Bernier, "L'Américanité ou la rencontre de l'altérité et de l'identité," in D. Cuccioletta, ed., *L'Américanité et les Amériques* (Québec: Éditions de l'IQRC, 2001), 183.

<sup>39</sup> Thérien and Mace, "Le Canada et l'option des Amériques," 120.

contrary, the desire for more involvement in the Americas (which can be understood as the acceptance of American-ness or *américanité*) corresponds to the desire for less involvement with the United States (which can be understood as resistance to Americanization). I therefore propose the idea that, for Canada, the slow acceptance of its American-ness or *américanité* will act as a new instrument to resist the long-feared Americanization.