

ACTIVITY REPORT



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Presentation by Dr. Wilfrid Greaves

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Democracy, Donald Trump, and the Future of the Canada-U.S. Security Community

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Dr. Wilfrid Greaves evaluates the impact of the Trump presidency on Canada-US relations within the framework of a pluralistic security community (PSC). The proposed argument is that *the Canada-U.S. PSC will not endure if the United States does not also consider Canada's national and security interests, or if the United States threatens those interests*. The outcome of the demise of the Canada-US PSC is that "the absence of war in North America may reflect American domination over a weaker and dependent Canada." In this presentation Greaves provides an assessment of harm of the Trump presidency to the Canada-US PSC resulting in the decline of a shared identity and mutual trust, and the undermining of democratic norms and institutions that underlie US domestic stability.

The concept of the PSC is examined exclusively with respect to the Canada-US dyad. A PSC describes a zone of peace where war has become unthinkable, spaces where sovereign units overcome suspicion on the basis of mutual interest, and a "we feeling" in a virtuous circle reinforcing trust, mutual consideration and sympathy, loyalty, partial mutual identification of self-interest and images, and "mutually successful predictions of behaviour."¹ PSCs share characteristics such as shared identities, values, and meanings; many-sided and direct relations; and long term interest and altruism that produce mutual trust and "dependable expectations of peaceful change."² The basic conditions of shared identity and mutual trust have defined the bilateral relationship since the late 19th century, but *comprehensive* security communities, such as the Canada-US PSC, also have expectations of peaceful change within their domestic politics. The basis of the North American zone of peace has been widely recognized as the stable democratic norms and institutions that have characterized both Canada and the United States.

Greaves reminds us that PSCs *can* regress from amity to conflict if conditions are not stable. The Canada-US PSC was formed through the processes of 1) demilitarizing the border and 2) elite imagining of a shared North American identity based on "cultural similarity, democracy, openness, the undefended border" and the "use of

arbitration and other depoliticized methods of conflict resolution.”³ Since the middle of the 20th century, the Canada-US PSC was institutionalized through “deep security, intelligence, and military cooperation and continental defence”, such as the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), NATO, NORAD, and the Five Eyes. If these processes are altered or undermined, the security community may be affected.

What has changed? The Canada-US relations have had ups and downs. The shared North American identity has been diverging since the 1960s, but during the Cold War, the shared existential threat posed by the Soviet Union motivated Canada to align with the US to preserve the democratic values and principles that guide us. In more recent times, particularly since 2003, American unilateralism has damaged allied relations. The Trump presidency has exacerbated these divisions, though the underlying divergence in interests and values between Americans and Canadians precedes Trump.

Greaves cites Drezner’s work “This Time Is Different” to refer to the way Trump has conducted himself in office as a significant turning point for US foreign policy.⁴ Greaves identifies multiple policy areas where the Trump Administration has directly challenged or harmed Canada’s national interests, but presents two recent cases as significant issues: 1) Steel and aluminum tariffs; and 2) COVID-19. The GOP framed the steel and aluminum issue as a threat to US national security, with implications for Canadian political economy. Trump’s handling of the COVID-19 situation was damaging in two ways: i) the withholding of 3M supplies from Canada, which had serious humanitarian consequences; and ii) the Canada-US border closure in March, with plans to send US troops to secure the border. Strong leadership in Canada led to Trump’s abandonment of both initiatives. Together with evidence of longer term divergence in social value and shared identity, these actions have damaged mutual trust and called into question whether Canada and the United States still share “a common security culture – an intersubjective system of meanings about international threats and their required solutions,”⁵ including whether North America as a whole is still considered a referent object of security and defence policy.

Trump’s alienating behaviour has had a significant impact on Canadian attitudes towards the United States. This behaviour has shaken mutual trust, particularly the US rejection of international commitments, namely the TPP, JCPOA, Paris Climate Change accords, INF Treaty (and recently Open Skies). Trump has demonstrated himself to be untrustworthy through his numerous lies (including about Canada), fraudulent business and personal history, and lack of transparency. More than 80 percent of Canadians view Trump as bad for Canada.

Greaves identifies four ways democracy has eroded under the Trump presidency: 1) Trump’s offensive personal conduct; 2) Trump’s obstruction of justice; 3) Trump’s unconstitutional conduct; and 4) undemocratic conduct by the Republican Party. The last is significant as the GOP is the most powerful US political party, although it is not popular. Under Trump, the GOP has impeded congressional oversight, fostered populist anger and mistrust of media, restricted voting rights, fueled Republican voters’ increasing support the undemocratic processes and institutions, and embraced pseudo-authoritarian politics. This is the MAGA factor, which Trump uses to influence his supporters and cast doubt on US elections. Trump supporters are likely to respond to the November election outcome in one of two ways: 1) be enraged if Trump loses the election; or 2) be emboldened if he wins. Most concerning is that Trump may refuse to concede defeat in November, which would cause significant damage to US democracy and could lead to further democratic de-consolidation in the US.

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While a change in US leadership would improve bilateral relations, it is unlikely to fully repair the damage caused during the Trump presidency. Trump has impacted the US government’s organizational and leadership culture, as well as deeply alienated Canadians from foreign policy alignment with the United States; mutual trust has been damaged, and the Canada-US relationship is unlikely to recover quickly. Current outcomes demonstrate that Americans can elect a president that can harm allies and Americans do not seem to care if the relationship is damaged. In considering the present and future of the Canada-US PSC, Greaves highlights the damage in terms of a weakened shared identity, shaken mutual trust, and democratic decline, a dissolving of “we-ness,” and the potential instability and risk of political violence around the 2020 US election.

In his final remarks, Greaves advises that: 1) without the foundations of a PSC, North America power relations favour the United States; 2) the PSC can be repaired since Canada-US bonds remain strong, and a shared identity and mutual trust can be repaired by the next president; and 3) Canada should not take for granted relations with US for its own national interests.

Engagement with the Ideas Series participants included a comparative approach to the Canada-US relationship under previous presidents contrasted with Donald Trump. Notably, Canadians’ lack of confidence in the US under President Trump is unprecedented in comparison to George W. Bush and Barack Obama. There was no issue linkage under the previous Administrations, as issues were dealt with independently to avoid political and diplomatic fallout. However, Trump is all about issue linkage, which Greaves suggests is a precedent now established in the presidency, to which Canada has limited recourse. During the Bush presidency, Canada was not a priority, but his politics did not directly harm Canada and did not create the lack of confidence that we see today, despite the unpopularity of his presidency. Similarly, under Obama, who was popular among Canadians, there was little change in attitudes and confidence toward the US. Whereas Trump, who is very unpopular, demonstrates untrustworthy provocative behaviour, reinforcing a lack of Canadian confidence in the US.

The question of whether Trudeau’s weak leadership and lack of foreign policy direction is a factor in the relationship was addressed. The response was that Trudeau has responded impressively. The Government of Canada’s response demonstrated clarity and principle (both Justin Trudeau and Chrystia Freeland) and *not* weakness, particularly in how they spoke to the Canadian-American relationship standing up for Canadian values and distinctiveness. This is not an endorsement of Trudeau, but credit for how he managed issues and did the best he could under the challenges posed by the unpredictability and volatility of Trump.

A question was asked whether the Soviet threat aligning Canada and the US during the Cold War is comparable to the threat of Russia and China today: Could this situation serve a similar unitary function, now that the “homeland is not a sanctuary”? Does this threat offset what the president is doing? The response is that the US would have Canada inside its tent, as China is a global rival of the US today. The issue concerns how to view China as an existential threat. It also assumes Canadian leverage in its relationship with the US and whether this leverage remains relevant or has eroded during the Trump presidency. Ottawa has been effective in mobilizing pressure in response to excessive US actions (for example the US troops at the border to contain COVID). Ottawa has employed its powerful network to apply pressure to the Trump Administration.

Final considerations addressed where Canada should turn to if the Canada-US relationship breaks down and what can citizens do outside of voting. The response was that domestic political engagement is important, although the ongoing process in the longer-term is a moving target as events are constantly changing. There is not much an individual can do outside of political community. The Canadian option is in nested security communities within North America and Western European allies. It is unimaginable that Canada would go to war with a European country. Canada's options, both economically and in the security dimension, have a way of buttressing its interests where it could lean into its relationships with allies. This approach could rebalance Canada's security relationships. Middle powers like Canada can leverage balance through mutual interests – for instance, NATO provides opportunities for Canada to leverage its influence.

Reflections

The presidency will end, but the legacy will endure
~ Dr. Wilfrid Greaves

Greaves' evaluation of the impact of the Trump presidency on the Canada-US PSC provides a valuable case study in Democratization Studies, particularly in understanding how democratic de-consolidation could occur in a Western liberal democracy. In this unique case, one that previously held up such values as racial and gender equality, civil rights, human rights, participation in the democratic process, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press – and intervened in countries abroad where these values and freedoms are suppressed. Trump's betrayal of these values and his provocative America First behaviour are unprecedented, indicating a significant turning point in US domestic politics and how it engages with the world, including Canada.

This discussion leaves its audience with a number of questions to grapple with: What does the legacy of the Trump presidency mean for the future of Canada as middle power, US partner and ally? What are the short- to long-term impacts on Canadian national interests? How can Canada best respond to the challenges created by Trump's leadership?

This presentation reveals a number of important themes and challenges in evaluating changes in the Canada-US security community:

- Decline in democratic norms and institutions
- Eroding identity and trust that Canada-US relations are founded upon
- US as a dominant power relative to Canada in the North American context
- Canada's strong leadership in pushing back against provocative behaviour by the US president
- Declining Canadian confidence and attitudes towards the US

Despite Trump's legacy and the damage it causes domestically and in relations with Canada, the relationship is likely to endure through the strength of relationships beyond the Administration, particularly within the North American defence, the Anglo-sphere, and European security context. The "deep security, intelligence, and

military cooperation and continental defence” through the PJBD, NATO, NORAD, and the Five Eyes was noted by Greaves. National security interests are better achieved through these arrangements than unilaterally. Thus, the relationship may be held together by maintaining a common identity and mutual trust through these partnerships in North America and in the global context.

¹ Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957. 36.

² Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, “A Framework for the Study of Security Communities.” In *Security Communities*, eds. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 31; Deutsch et al., 1957: 5

³ Sean M. Shore, “No Fences Make Good Neighbours: The Development of the Canadian-US Security Community, 1871-1940.” In *Security Communities*, eds. Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. Cambridge University Press, 1998. 348.

⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, “This Time is Different: Why U.S. Foreign Policy Will Never Recover.” *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2009.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-04-16/time-different>.

⁵ Vincent Pouliot, “The Alive and Well Transatlantic Security Community: A Theoretical Reply to Michael Cox.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 1 (2006): 119-127.