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Democracy, Donald Trump and the Canada-US Security Community

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Abstract

This article examines Canada-US relations through their shared membership in a pluralistic security community (PSC). While the bilateral relationship has been turbulent for decades, the Trump presidency has damaged the Canada-US PSC by (1) exacerbating a decades-long trend of weakened shared identity and mutual trust between Canadians and Americans, and (2) undermining the democratic norms and institutions that uphold American domestic stability and Canadians' expectations of peaceful change. Assessing the combined implications of the decline in shared identity, mutual trust and democratic stability, I argue that the Canada-US PSC cannot endure if the United States does not also consider Canada's national and security interests or if the United States itself poses a threat to those interests. Given current trends, the future absence of war in North America may reflect American domination over a weaker and dependent Canada rather than their continued membership in a bilateral PSC.

Résumé

Cet article examine les relations canado-américaines à travers leur appartenance à une communauté pluraliste de la sécurité (CPS). Alors que les relations bilatérales ont été mouvementées pendant des décennies, la présidence Trump a porté préjudice à la CPS Canada-États-Unis 1) en exacerbant une tendance à l'affaiblissement de l'identité commune et de la confiance mutuelle entre Canadiens et Américains qui dure depuis des décennies, et 2) en sapant les normes et institutions démocratiques qui soutiennent la stabilité intérieure américaine et les attentes des Canadiens en matière de changement pacifique. En évaluant les implications combinées du déclin de l'identité partagée, de la confiance mutuelle et de la stabilité démocratique, je soutiens que la CPS canado-américaine ne peut pas durer si les États-Unis ne tiennent pas compte également de la sécurité nationale et de la sécurité du Canada ou si les États-Unis eux-mêmes constituent une menace pour ces intérêts. Compte tenu des tendances actuelles, l'absence future de guerre en Amérique du Nord pourrait refléter la domination américaine sur un Canada plus faible et plus dépendant plutôt que le maintien de leur appartenance à une CPS bilatérale.

Keywords: Canada; democracy; North America; security community; United States

Mots-clés : Canada; démocratie; Amérique du Nord; communauté de la sécurité; États-Unis

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Introduction

Among the foreign policy consequences of Donald Trump's election as president of the United States has been a deterioration in Canada-US relations, which have underpinned North American security and defence since the 1930s. Despite efforts to reflect normalcy in what remains the deepest bilateral relationship in the world, Canada-US relations under Trump have been rocked by diplomatic disputes across a range of issues, including a multilateral trade war, contentious free trade renegotiations, US-China competition, numerous policy disagreements, personal attacks by the president against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, candid "hot mic" comments by Trudeau about President Trump, and the ineffective American response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent research on Canada-US relations varies in its assessment but emphasizes that Trump's pursuit of a vague "America First" foreign policy, defined by reversing US-led international institutionalism and rejecting multilateral diplomacy, poses serious challenges to Canada's national interests (Hillmer and Lagassé, 2018; Carment and Sands, 2019). At the time of writing, Canada-US relations remain poor, with limited prospects for improvement absent a change of leadership in the United States.

Disagreements and personality conflicts are nothing new to Canada-US relations. Notwithstanding their countless areas of policy alignment and technical cooperation, diplomatic disputes between Canada and the United States have occurred regularly. But this should not obscure how much bilateral bonds have frayed, or the implications of this fraying for the future. This article explores the implications of the Trump presidency for Canada and the United States' membership in a pluralistic security community (PSC) in which violent conflict has become unthinkable. While the Canada-US PSC may still exist, it has eroded over recent decades, culminating with specific damage caused by the Trump presidency to the foundations of any security community: shared identity, mutual trust and domestic stability. Today, shared identity between Canadians and Americans has weakened, mutual trust is shaken and democratic decline within the United States threatens the basis of the North American PSC. Assessing the implications, I argue that the Canada-US PSC cannot endure if the United States does not also consider Canada's national and security interests or if the United States itself poses a threat to those interests. Given current trends, future non-war relations in North America may simply reflect the imbalance in relative power between the two countries.

In the first section, I outline the theory of pluralistic security communities and detail the Canada-US PSC. In the second section, I demonstrate how the Trump administration has helped erode shared identity and weakened mutual trust within the Canada-US PSC, directly or indirectly harming Canada's national interests. In the third section, I argue that the Canada-US PSC is particularly damaged by the Trump administration's assault on democratic norms and institutions within the United States, which are necessary for Canada to trust its more powerful American counterpart. In the final section, I discuss whether the bilateral relationship could cease to be a PSC, since without American consideration of Canadian interests, non-war in North America would more convincingly be explained by US domination of a weaker Canada than by membership in a PSC.

Security Communities

In the late 1950s, Karl Deutsch and colleagues coined the concept of “security community” to explain the postwar peace among former enemies in Europe and North America. A security community is a region in which inter-state war has become unthinkable, characterized by

mutual sympathy and loyalties; of “we feeling,” trust, and mutual consideration; of partial identification in terms of self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behavior . . . in short, a matter of a perpetual dynamic process of mutual attention, communication, perception of needs, and responsiveness in the process of decision making. (Deutsch et al., 1957: 36)

Security communities are political spaces in which sovereign actors overcome mutual suspicion and renounce inter-state violence on the basis of amity or common interests. “Amalgamated” security communities occur when units pool their sovereignty and integrate, as in federal states; when units retain their sovereignty, they are “pluralistic” security communities. The exemplar of this theory is the “dependable expectations of peaceful change” that produced a “non-war” region around the North Atlantic after the Second World War (Deutsch et al., 1957: 5).

Security community research was revived in the 1990s by Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, who identified shared identity and mutual trust as “the proximate necessary conditions for the development of dependable expectations of peaceful change. . . . The development of trust can strengthen mutual identification, and there is a general tendency to trust on the basis of mutual identification” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 45). PSCs can be loosely or tightly coupled depending on whether their members retain separate identities and institutions, but all PSCs share three characteristics: “First, members of a community have shared identities, values, and meanings. . . . Secondly, those in a community have many-sided and direct relations. . . . Thirdly, communities exhibit a reciprocity that expresses some degree of long-term interest and perhaps even altruism” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 31). Some scholars have expanded this definition by arguing that relations of non-war are insufficient to constitute a PSC. Instead, they differentiate between “inter-state” security communities defined by the unthinkability of inter-state war and “comprehensive” security communities wherein expectations of peaceful change also apply *domestically*. Väyrynen (2000: 172) notes: “A pluralistic security community should require that the probability of violence is low both in the external and internal relations of its member states. Thus, peace and security have both an extra- and intra-state dimension that are conceptually distinct, but must empirically co-exist if a region is to be regarded as a security community.” Nathan (2006: 277–78) insists that “domestic stability, defined as the absence of large-scale violence in a country, is a necessary condition of a security community.” And Tuscisny (2007: 427) summarizes that “if large scale violence is still seen as a possible means of regime change, national liberation, or oppression of political opponents, such a region simply does not meet the criteria of a security community, regardless of the likelihood of interstate war.” The basic conditions necessary for the maintenance of a PSC are thus shared identity and mutual trust between members and domestic stability *within* members.

PSCs are not static and may regress from non-war to violent conflict; Adler and Barnett (1998: 58) cite examples of security communities “disintegrating” during periods of imperial decline, after the Cold War and due to other systemic shocks. Others expressly challenge security scholars to more carefully examine the conditions under which PSCs might dissolve (Wæver, 1998: 76; Ditrych, 2014: 359). Declarations of peace and friendship, even long-standing conditions of non-war, demonstrate neither the existence nor durability of a PSC, since “formal commitments can be breached, and the low probability or absence of war might be due to the balance of power or other dynamics unrelated to a security community” (Nathan, 2006: 293). Shared identity, mutual trust and other variables that underpin specific sets of inter-state relations must be examined to determine whether a PSC exists or whether non-war results from other factors.

The Canada-US pluralistic security community

Despite widespread discussion of a pluralistic security community straddling the Atlantic, three overlapping but distinct communities are variously identified: a North Atlantic PSC comprising members of NATO; a North American PSC comprising the United States, Canada and Mexico; and the dyadic PSC of Canada and the United States. As the exemplar of Deutsch et al.’s seminal work, the North Atlantic region has been widely studied (see Deutsch et al., 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998; Wæver, 1998; Williams and Neumann, 2000; Cox, 2005, 2006; Pouliot, 2006; Gheciu, 2019). Other scholars identify a trilateral North American PSC that formed gradually after the emergence of amalgamated security communities in the 13 American colonies after 1787, the British North American colonies after 1867 and Mexico after 1920 (Gonzalez and Haggard, 1998; Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 270–76; Haglund, 2010: 190).

The dyadic Canada-US PSC is more convincing than accounts of a trilateral North American PSC. War between Canada and Mexico is unlikely due to their geographic distance and relationships with the United States, rather than a shared identity or high mutual trust. It is also unclear whether the United States and Mexico even form a dyadic PSC, if they ever did. Nathan (2006: 291) notes “the absence of a tightly coupled security community between the US and Mexico,” and others have identified American nativism as a threat to the North American PSC (Gonzalez and Haggard, 1998: 295; Haglund, 2010: 198). The anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican rhetoric and policies associated with the Trump administration are well known but beyond the scope of this article. However, given that racism and linguistic difference between the United States and Mexico have impeded a common identity (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 272), the absence of mutual trust due to the construction of Trump’s border wall and general vilification of Mexicans makes it hard to consider them part of a community in which violent conflict is unthinkable.

By contrast, the Canada-US dyad is usually overlooked, despite the fact that Canada and the United States institutionalized peaceful relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Shore, 1998; Roussel, 2004), making it “the oldest and most stable bilateral security community in the world” (Hataley and Leuprecht, 2019: 101). Indeed, establishing a security community in northern North America was likely necessary for the formation of the broader North Atlantic PSC, as it freed military and

economic resources for the United States and Canada to prosper and contribute to both world wars. The Canada-US PSC was formed through two processes: demilitarization of their border and elite imagining of a shared North American identity (Shore, 1998: 335). Three types of interaction—interpersonal contact, ideas and popular culture, and economic relations—“helped to homogenize (mostly Americanize) the two societies, and made the idea of a specifically ‘North American’ way of life seem intuitively plausible” (Shore, 1998: 351). Though never monolithic or universal, a shared North American identity applied to the culturally, politically and economically more similar Canada and the United States and made the North American PSC, until at least the 1980s, exclusively a bilateral one (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 269). Shared identity facilitated amity that produced a “we feeling” that “made trust part of Canadian and American self-identification. . . . Even when domestic political actors have behaved in ways contrary to those identities, they were unable to undermine the basic trust that existed between Americans and Canadians” (Shore, 1998: 348, 355–56). The demilitarization of the Canada-US border, in particular, allowed for a shared identity partly based on the fact that Canadians and Americans trusted each other enough *not* to worry about invasion. In the second half of the twentieth century, the PSC was institutionalized through deep security, intelligence and military cooperation, including a bilateral advisory body (the Permanent Joint Board on Defence) and a binational command structure for the defence of North America (NORAD) (Charron and Fergusson, 2019).

Social learning and elite policy and norm entrepreneurs are critical factors in security community formation, meaning that elites articulating new norms will likely also play a role in a PSC’s disintegration (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 43–44; Shore, 1998: 335). To Sean Shore (1998: 359), “the US-Canadian case suggests . . . actors’ beliefs and preferences are not static, but are instead acquired through experience and reflection. New behavior or new ideas can lead actors to revise their preexisting images of one another and generate new understandings of their relationship.” While describing a positive process that can overcome enmity to form a PSC, this could also characterize the regression of a security community from amity toward conflict. This underscores the need to examine the Canada-US PSC: to identify the conditions under which specific security communities may be threatened. David Haglund (2010: 193) has suggested that “we might want to ask, bluntly, whether the North American zone of peace really is ‘idiot proof, in the sense that nothing can be imagined that would return any of the three countries of North America to their prior condition of having been bad instead of good neighbours.” If there is no trilateral North American PSC, then oft-cited concerns such as irregular border crossers and cross-border violence between Mexico and the United States are not directly relevant to the Canada-US relationship (Gonzalez and Haggard, 1998: 295; Haglund, 2010: 190). Instead, their dyadic PSC should be examined in light of several turbulent decades in global politics and bilateral relations and the specific disruptions wrought by the Trump presidency.

Donald Trumps Canada: Undermining Shared Identity and Mutual Trust

Concerns over the health of the transatlantic community have been common in the post-9/11 period, long preceding the election of Donald Trump. Michael Cox

(2005) argued that George W. Bush damaged the North Atlantic PSC in 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq over the objection of most of its European allies (and Canada, which Cox omits). This argument produced a lively debate (Cox, 2006; Pouliot, 2006), but there is general agreement that rifts between the United States and its allies emerged during the 1990s as America adjusted to unipolar status, European integration deepened and NATO reoriented its mission for an altered global security context (Risse, 2003; Pond, 2004). The Bush administration abandoned multiple foreign policies and international agreements favoured by US allies, including Canada under the Chrétien and Martin governments (Azzi and Hilmer, 2016). The Obama years failed to mend bilateral tensions, mostly due to policy differences between President Obama and then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper on issues such as climate change, energy, the Iran nuclear agreement and support for Israeli occupation of Palestine (Robertson, 2012; Paquin, 2018). But the difference between these disagreements and the deeper crisis of the Trump presidency is telling, with observers worrying that “this time is different. . . . US foreign policy will never recover” (Drezner, 2019). Though Canada is again overlooked in Drezner’s otherwise detailed critique of Trump’s foreign policy, the warning also applies to the Canada-US PSC.

Donald Trump’s election catalyzed a rapid deterioration in Canada-US relations. Numerous actions taken by his administration challenge Canada’s national interests, including undermining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and weakening US commitment to collective defence, threatened cancellation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), involving Canada in the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China, weakening the nuclear arms limitation regime and undermining global climate change governance (see Hilmer and Lagassé, 2018; Carment and Sands, 2019). In May 2019, the administration reversed 30 years of precedent by characterizing Canada’s legal claims with respect to the Northwest Passage as “illegitimate” (Lajeunesse and Huebert, 2019). Canadian officials and observers have also expressed concern that scheduled upgrades to NORAD could attract unfavourable presidential attention (Timmons, 2018; Charron and Fergusson, 2019). Particularly noteworthy is Trump’s 2018 decision to impose tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum exports to the United States on the basis of national security, a policy Prime Minister Trudeau denounced as “absurd . . . inconceivable . . . unacceptable . . . [and] an affront to the long-standing security partnership between Canada and the United States” (Bowden, 2018). The result was a 50 per cent reduction in Canadian steel exports over the following year and collected tariffs of around Can\$200 million per month. This led some to conclude that Trump’s approach to trade “threatens the very essence of the post-1980s nature of the Canadian political economy” (Nimijean, 2019: 44) and provoked reciprocal tariffs from Canada and other countries that lasted over a year and caused the most serious allied diplomatic dispute since the Iraq War. Although aluminum tariffs against Canada were lifted in May 2019, President Trump announced in August 2020 that they would be reimposed on national security grounds, just a month after the renegotiated North American free trade agreement he championed came into effect.

The relationship was dealt more blows in the first months of 2020. On January 8, a Ukraine International Airlines flight departing Tehran was shot down by the

Iranian military, killing 176 people aboard including 55 Canadian citizens and 30 permanent residents. The downing came just hours after Iranian missile strikes on American military facilities in Iraq, ordered in response to the assassination by the United States of an Iranian general days before. Fearing US retaliation, Iranian forces mistook the departing airplane for an incoming missile. In the days following, Prime Minister Trudeau indicated that the United States bore partial responsibility for escalating regional tensions, eliciting protests from American officials (McMahon, 2020). Trudeau also noted that Canada had not been informed of the strike that precipitated the regional crisis, which had endangered the safety of Canadian military personnel leading a NATO training mission to Iraq, forcing their withdrawal.

While serious, these issues were quickly overwhelmed by the COVID-19 global pandemic that unfolded in February and March, resulting in the lockdown of hundreds of millions of people and frenzied confusion over international mobility, repatriation of citizens and acquisition of essential medical supplies and equipment. In this context, the Trump administration made a series of decisions that directly harmed Canada. It ordered the leading US manufacturer of medical protective equipment to stop exporting face masks and respirators to Canada. In a move the company described as having “serious humanitarian consequences,” at least four million masks bound for Canada were stopped at the border before an exemption was negotiated (Lao, 2020). On March 18, both countries agreed to close the border to nonessential, noncommercial traffic. While a major departure from the norm of facilitating border crossing, the high rates of infection and poor overall government response in the United States meant the measure was widely considered necessary to protect public health in Canada (Luce, 2020). But the border closure agreement was quickly overshadowed by an administration proposal to deploy 1,000 soldiers to secure and surveil the border against supposed COVID-infected border crossers irregularly entering the United States (Klippenstein, 2020). The idea was supported by President Trump—who suggested US troops were already at the border, called it “equal justice” because of the existing militarization of the US-Mexico border and proudly linked the proposal to the recent tariffs on Canada—before being abandoned following uncharacteristically direct protests from Canada, such as the deputy prime minister’s statement that it would be “damaging to our relationship. . . . We just don’t think this is the right way to treat a trusted friend and ally” (quoted in Champion-Smith, 2020). In the context of an unfolding health crisis threatening life and public order in both countries and around the world, the Trump administration took actions that directly harmed Canada (for example, restricting medical equipment) and considered others, (for example, militarizing the border) that were factually baseless, strategically counterproductive and diplomatically damaging (Brewster, 2020). The border has been closed since March 21, and at the time of writing there is little sign that it will reopen this year, and little desire among Canadians for it to do so. Collectively, these actions call 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” (Pouliot, 2006: 123), including whether North America as a whole is still considered a referent object of security and defence policy.

Shared identity

Security communities require a common conception of security threats, since this reflects the common interests, shared identity and mutual trust that underpin non-war relations. A shared North American identity emerged in the early twentieth century as the First World War constituted Europe as Other to a new North American Self based on “cultural similarity, democracy, openness, the undefended border, and the enlightened use of arbitration and other depoliticized methods of conflict resolution” (Shore, 1998: 348). Since the 1960s, however, cultural shifts have increasingly constituted the US as Other to the Canadian Self. The divergence in American and Canadian social and political attitudes suggests “at the most basic level—the level of our values, the feelings and beliefs that inform our understanding of and interaction with the world around us—Canadians and Americans are markedly different, and becoming more so” (Adams, 2003: 4). Social values research demonstrates that while Canadians and Americans remain similar compared to many other societies, the gap between them widened as the latter became increasingly polarized over questions of tolerance and inclusion, deference to authority, the welfare state and America’s global role, while Canadians remain relatively unified around values of human rights, gender equity, respect for the law, and ethnic and cultural diversity (Adams, 2003, 2017; Sinha, 2015). Though the mechanisms that connect social values to political institutions and public policy are indirect, decision making within democratic societies is broadly responsive to public opinion (Burstein, 2003; Petry and Mendelsohn, 2004). For Canada, bilateral relations with the United States have always been shaped by popular concerns over the sovereignty, national identity and economic implications of being close(r) to the United States (Nimijean, 2019).

Donald Trump has further weakened a shared North American identity by alienating many Canadians from the United States. The number of Canadians who felt Canada was becoming more like the United States declined from a high of nearly 65 per cent in 2014 to 25 per cent in 2017; 52 per cent indicated Canada should become less like the United States and only 8 per cent more like it (Ekos, 2017: 7). In 2018, 56 per cent of Canadians had an unfavourable impression of the United States, with only 39 per cent favourable—comparable to the decline in US favourability among its Western European allies. Notably, Canadian favourability toward the United States went back up in 2019, to 51 per cent, due to a jump in support for Trump among those on the political right, though it remained lower than at any other point on record. This distinguishes Trump from his two immediate predecessors, neither of whose popularity had a significant effect on Canadians’ attitudes toward America or support for US policies. George W. Bush was nearly as unpopular among Canadians in 2007 as Trump was in 2018 (28% vs. 25%), but 55 per cent of Canadians still had a favourable opinion of the United States, compared to 39 per cent in 2018 (Wike et al., 2020: 36–37). Likewise, Canadian confidence in Barack Obama (83% in 2016) exceeded favourability toward the United States (65%), yet support for closer national security, border security and counter-terrorism cooperation with the United States declined during the Obama presidency (Eagles and Nanos, 2017: 737–38). In 2018, 66 per cent of Canadians felt

relations with the United States had worsened since 2017, and 82 per cent felt that the United States took Canada's interests into account "not too much or not at all" (Wike et al., 2018), reflecting decreased trust in the president and the country overall.

Mutual trust

The second pillar of "we feeling" within a PSC is mutual trust: "believing despite uncertainty . . . Trust is a social phenomenon and dependent on the assessment that another actor will behave in ways that are consistent with normative expectations" (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 46). Trust may be even more important than identity for maintaining a PSC because it is needed to overcome suspicion inherent under international anarchy (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 58). The Trump presidency has damaged mutual trust in at least two ways. First, withdrawing from America's international commitments has been a staple of the administration's foreign policy, including withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, Iran nuclear agreement, Paris climate change agreement, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces and Open Skies arms control treaties and the World Health Organization, while threatening to withdraw from NATO, NAFTA and the World Trade Organization. Trump's National Security Strategy incoherently fuses "America First" with America's post-Second World War global leadership (Ettinger, 2018), the president routinely reverses and contradicts himself and his officials on policy, and he frequently rages and insults other world leaders. Combined with high turnover of foreign policy staff and the conduct of policy via presidential tweet, Trump's refusal to support institutions the United States helped establish, abide by the United States' legal obligations or specify consistent policies on a range of international issues has severely damaged America's international credibility (Yarhi-Milo, 2018; Drezner, 2019; Walt, 2019).

Second, as an individual, Donald Trump is untrustworthy. He lies more often and about more things than any past president, with the number of documented lies exceeding 16,000 in his first three years in office (Kessler et al., 2020). It is not an exaggeration to say that Trump appears unable to speak publicly without uttering demonstrable, often obvious, falsehoods. While most of his lies pertain to American issues, Trump has told at least 43 different lies about Canada, and he told them numerous—often dozens—of times between April 2017 and April 2019 (Dale, 2019). Most of these lies concern bilateral trade, specifically the effects of the United States' import tariffs or Trump's inaccurate insistence that the United States has a large trade deficit with Canada. Other statements personally insult and directly reference private discussions with Prime Minister Trudeau—an obvious breach of trust—while taking apparent pleasure in putting Canada in its place (Trump, 2019). In the years since Trump took office, his personal and business history have also been exposed as both fraudulent and criminal (Barstow et al., 2018), revealing a long-standing pattern of lies and fabrication and setting the tone for his administration to be the least transparent and most corrupt of modern times (Ellington, 2019; Parker et al., 2020).

For their part, Canadians distrust Trump and worry over his policies. Polling after the 2016 election showed Canadians were "shocked," "surprised,"

“disappointed” and “disgusted” at the result; 8 per cent reported being “somewhat pleased” and only 6 per cent “really happy” (Anderson and Coletto, 2016). A survey after Trump’s first 100 days in office found more than two-thirds of Canadians identified him as the worst or one of the worst presidents in history; asked to assess his policies, between 64 and 85 per cent across all questions anticipated Trump would make things worse, including 79 per cent who expected he would harm Canada’s economy (Anderson and Coletto, 2017). When asked whether Canada should pursue a “Canada First” policy similar to Trump’s “America First” foreign policy, 60 per cent said no and 36 per cent said yes (Ekos, 2017: 7–8). Overall, “more than 80% of Canadians see the US President as arrogant, mean, unethical, thoughtless, undisciplined, and someone with bad values. Large majorities see him as dumb, unprincipled, ignorant and dishonest” (Anderson and Coletto, 2017). “There is no regional or demographic group anywhere in Canada that gives President Trump a net positive approval rating” (Ekos, 2017: 6), and in 2019, 71 per cent of Canadians had no confidence in Trump to “do the right thing” in world affairs (Wike et al., 2020: 14).

Though these numbers reflect longer trends of divergent values and growing Canadian skepticism of US politics, the central problem for the bilateral relationship is Donald Trump, whose personal qualities and policy goals Canadians reject across demographic, regional and partisan divides and with whom Canadians now associate the United States as a whole. Although there is greater affinity for Trump on the right wing of Canada’s political spectrum (Wike et al., 2020: 39), including former prime minister Stephen Harper, the generalized Canadian dislike for Trump makes it unlikely a Conservative government would have found greater room for compromise or have been spared the erratic currents of Trump’s personal favour. For a security community brought together through demilitarization of the border and elite imaginings of a shared identity, a president who seeks to militarize the border and has no such imagination is a problem no matter who governs Canada. Both countries have endured challenges in their relationship, but for shared identity and mutual trust to be undermined simultaneously by a sitting president is a serious blow to the foundations of the PSC. As a recent former US ambassador in Ottawa put it, Trump “is systematically poisoning this most important relationship with our closest neighbor. . . . Trust and honesty are being eroded through lies and intimidation” (Heyman and Heyman, 2019). Past expectations of the bilateral relationship are thus a poor indicator of the continued health of the Canada-US PSC, particularly in light of the ongoing damage to an underexamined aspect of the North American zone of peace: democratic norms and domestic instability in the United States.

Democracy, Domestic Stability and the North American PSC

Democratic norms and institutions were fundamental to the emergence of the Canada-US PSC, distinguishing as they did the North American experience from Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. Deutsch et al. (1957: 66) noted that “compatibility of major values relevant to political decision-making is an essential background condition of pluralistic security communities.” No value is more central to the Canada-US PSC than democracy, which is universally

recognized as relevant for the formation and maintenance of security communities, in general, and the North American PSC, in particular (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 40; Shore, 1998: 348; Roussel, 2004: 9–10; Tuscicisny, 2007: 428; Haglund, 2010: 190; Hataley and Leuprecht, 2019: 100).

The erosion of democracy in the United States during the Trump presidency is thus of considerable relevance to the Canada-US PSC. The details are numerous but can be summarized in four categories. First is offensive personal conduct by the president, including witness tampering and intimidation; inciting violence against journalists, jurists, Democratic members of Congress, racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, and former president Barack Obama; embracing white supremacists; abusing the pardon power; and demanding personal loyalty oaths from political and law enforcement officials in the US government. Second is obstruction of justice by the president through efforts to impede the FBI investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 general election; the investigation into obstruction of justice and Russian election interference by the Justice Department's Special Counsel; and congressional oversight into a range of activities connected with Trump and his officials, including impeachment hearings. Third is unconstitutional conduct by the president, including violating the "Emoluments Clause" and separation of powers enshrined in the US Constitution (Kamarck, 2018; Abramowitz, 2019; Mueller, 2019; Parker et al., 2020). These offences all predate the further serious violations of constitutional rights and democratic norms that occurred in May and June 2020 when President Trump deployed federal troops against people protesting police violence in Washington, DC, and across the United States.

The fourth category is conduct of the Republican Party in enabling Trump and impeding congressional oversight or sanction of his unconstitutional actions, as well as utilizing their legislative majorities in various US states to, among other things, restrict voting rights among Democratic-leaning groups, foster populist anger and mistrust of media and other political institutions, entrench gerrymandered congressional districts and strip executive powers from incoming Democratic governors (Gawthorpe, 2018; Levitz, 2018; Bouie, 2019). Republican voters increasingly support overtly anti-democratic processes and institutions. One 2017 study found that 52 per cent of Republican voters would support postponing the 2020 presidential election if Trump proposed it (Malka and Lelkes, 2017), and another that the number of Republicans who support increasing executive power so "presidents didn't have to worry so much about Congress or the courts" more than tripled between 2016 and 2019 to 42 per cent, compared to only 16 per cent of Democrats and 29 per cent of all respondents (Pew Research Center, 2019). The result is the entrenchment of anti-democratic, authoritarian politics across much of the United States and within the dominant ideology of its most electorally effective political party.

Donald Trump's affinity for undemocratic and illiberal politicians internationally, including praise for notoriously violent leaders, has been widely noted, as has his distancing of America from its democratic allies. In disquieting imitation of these strongmen, Trump has frequently speculated about extending his presidency beyond the constitutionally limited two terms. In March 2018, he remarked that President Xi Jinping of China is "president for life . . . I think it's great. Maybe we'll have to give that a shot someday." In April 2019, he said he might remain in

office for “the next 10–14 years,” reiterating in May that he could serve up to five terms (Zhao, 2019). In June 2019, he insinuated his supporters might “demand” he remain in office longer than two terms, and in December 2019, Trump surrogates made the *prima facie* unconstitutional case for why investigations into his presidency warranted a third term in office. These statements fuel concern that Trump will refuse to concede the 2020 presidential election should he lose, just as some feared he would not have conceded in 2016 had Hillary Clinton won by a narrow margin. Doubts over a peaceful transfer of power are fuelled by Trump and his supporters’ frequent denigration of the US electoral process and invocation of a supposed “coup” to usurp his presidency. In June 2019, Trump reiterated that he would accept help from a foreign adversary in the 2020 election, and in February 2020, he was impeached by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives but acquitted by the Republican-controlled Senate for attempting to coerce precisely such assistance from the government of Ukraine. After the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Trump wrongly claimed to possess “total authority” to order governors to end their state lockdowns, and he and his advisers suggested postponing the election due to the virus. These incidents, taken together, strengthen the evidence for democratic “deconsolidation” within the United States (Foa and Mounk, 2017; Howe, 2017). As with the broader decline in transatlantic relations, the story does not begin with Trump, but it has significantly worsened since his election and due to his conduct in office.

All this has damaged American democracy, with the United States’ freedom index score dropping by 8/100 points over the last eight years, including 3 points the year that Trump took office. The United States now ranks 53rd in the world, far behind all others in the North Atlantic region, including Canada, which is ranked 4th globally, and Freedom House notes that Trump’s “ongoing attacks on the rule of law, fact-based journalism, and other principles and norms of democracy threaten further decline” (Abramowitz, 2019). Though distinct, the administration’s implementation of border security and immigration policies that violate US and international law is also relevant, including denial of legal rights to asylum seekers; mandatory family separation at the southern border; indefinite detention of hundreds of thousands of migrants, including children; and threatened mass roundup of migrants across the United States (Blow, 2019; Stieb, 2019). These measures compromise democratic norms and the “openness” that helped produce the “we feeling” between Canada and the United States. Such policies risk continued damage to the foundations of the Canada-US PSC because “where a government is guilty of gross human rights abuses, neighbouring countries might feel compelled to raise concerns that provoke a bellicose response” (Nathan, 2006: 282). Though measured, Canadian officials from all parties, including Prime Minister Trudeau, have condemned these policies as attacks on liberal democratic values (Freeland, 2018; Harris, 2018).

The damage to American democracy foreshadows the risk of domestic instability surrounding the 2020 election. A refusal by Trump to concede the presidency to a victorious opponent would cause turmoil not seen in the United States since at least the 1960s, and likely the Civil War, threatening constitutional order and rule of law. The political violence associated with the Trump presidency (Saramo, 2017) and overt suggestions that Trump supporters will defend his presidency through

force (Jaffe and Johnson, 2019; McCord, 2019; Reich, 2019) call into question not just the United States' part in a PSC with Canada but whether it will remain an amalgamated security community that protects its own people. During the pandemic, scenes of heavily armed citizens and self-identified militia members, encouraged by Trump, defying public health orders in order to protest at legislatures and public buildings—praising Trump, threatening violence to Democratic officials and forcing the suspension of legislative proceedings—were a further illustration of these concerns. Shocking nationwide instances of police targeting protestors and journalists during the May/June protests, as well as Trump's subsequent deployment of the military against American citizens and threats to end the protests, are simply more alarm bells clamouring the democratic crisis underway in the United States.

The decline of American democracy has not been lost on Canadians, 59 per cent of whom indicate they do not feel that the US government “respects the personal freedoms of its people” under President Trump, compared to 38 per cent who do (Wike et al., 2018). This exceeds the European median of 55 per cent on the same question and is far higher than the 25-country median of 37 per cent. By contrast, in 2013, 75 per cent of Canadians agreed that the United States respected individual freedoms. Living next door, most Canadians see that “Trump exerts an influence on American politics that is straining [its] core values and testing the stability of [its] constitutional system. No president in living memory has shown less respect for its tenets, norms, and principles” (Abramowitz, 2019). Trump's effect on American politics thus imperils the Canada-US PSC, since “a security community rests on dependable *expectations* of peaceful change. Notwithstanding the absence of violence in a given country, its citizens and neighbouring states may believe that there is a strong possibility of domestic or cross-border violence occurring in the future” (Nathan, 2006: 291; emphasis in original). Security communities are fundamentally about international practices that produce regions of non-war, but “equally important is that states govern their domestic behavior in ways that are consistent with the community” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 36). If a shared commitment to democracy was key to forming a PSC, democratic decline within one member will weaken the community's shared identity and common interests, particularly if the other members maintain their democratic values and institutions. The erratic policy making, social instability and political violence roiling the United States have rightly shaken Canadians' expectations of peaceful change within its domestic and international affairs.

Severe or sustained democratic decline in the United States presents frightening new terrain for Canada; in addition to the domestic implications, the decline raises international concerns. The United States has been the leading global democracy of the last century, and democracy promotion has featured prominently, though not consistently, in US foreign policy, often with Canadian support. As a so-called middle power with limited military capabilities and thus a vested interest in maintaining a rules-based international system, Canada has encouraged democratization as a means of both encouraging international peace and security and promoting its own ideational and commercial interests (Ladd, 2014). But the rapid and unprecedented global democratization since 1989 is intimately connected to America's ideological commitment and material support for democracy. A likely “aftershock” of a

sustained decline in American democracy would be democratic rollback around the world (Gunitsky, 2016), causing further harm to international order and institutions. But the core relevance of democratic decline in the United States for the argument presented here is what it augurs for the Canada-US security community.

Conclusion

As Hillmer and Lagassé (2018: 13) note: “Commentaries about contemporary politics are always perilous, but they become downright dangerous when the man in the White House is so unpredictable, so untethered by principle, so alienated from the system of which he is a part.” Under such circumstances, predictions are even more perilous. But the combination of a weakened shared identity, shaken mutual trust and democratic decline in the United States risk serious damage to the Canada-US PSC and call into question whether it remains an accurate characterization of the two countries’ relationship. Security communities are not idylls and still experience power politics among their members, but inter-state *and* domestic politics within them are governed by expectations of peaceful change. Instability and the risk of political violence surrounding the 2020 US election undermine Canada’s expectations of nonviolence and democracy in the United States, which are foundational to the Canada-US PSC. The threatened cancellation of NAFTA, imposition of trade sanctions on spurious national security grounds and myopically nationalistic and politicized response to the COVID-19 pandemic, among other developments, illustrate that without effective democratic norms and institutions, there are few safeguards for Canada, as the weaker partner, against the coercive exercise of US power. If “what is important [for a PSC] is that power is not simply coercive but also conveys a sense of purpose and, potentially, a vision of the future” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 52), the problem with Trump’s exercise of power is that it is purposeful only insofar as it benefits his personal interests. As this comes at the expense of shared identity, mutual trust and American democracy, the Trump presidency pushes the Canada-US PSC closer to “a threshold of conflict beyond which the ‘we-ness’ constitutive of the community dissolves” (Pouliot, 2006: 123). Since PSCs require reciprocity and “some degree of long-term interest and perhaps even altruism” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 31), can one survive if the stronger actor demonstrates only short-term self-interest and selfishness or imposes its will over the weaker—or the weaker actor has an expectation it might? Can the PSC endure if the United States does not also consider Canada’s national and security interests or if the United States itself threatens those interests? And if the “we feeling” based on common values, mutual interests, reciprocity, and democratic norms and institutions that underpin expectations of peaceful change in North America is eroded, what kind of relationship might take its place?

The question of whether Canada and the United States actually form a PSC has been teased before, as when Wæver (1998: 72) noted that while Canada-US and the Nordic countries both exemplify PSCs, “only the latter avoids the possible counter-arguments of quasi-imperial hegemony explanations.” In some ways, the issue is unresolvable, reflecting deep ontological questions on the nature of Canada, the bilateral relationship and international politics—even the very existence of security communities (Ditrych, 2014). Scholars have argued for decades whether Canada is an

autonomous principal power; a middle power that operates with coalitions of like-minded states; or a satellite, colony, or penetrated minor power dominated by the United States (Clarkson, 1968; Dewitt and Kirton, 1983; Hawes, 1984; Bow and Lennox, 2008). Analytically, a central question for determining whether a PSC still exists thus involves distinguishing what Canada does for itself from what it does at the behest of the United States. This echoes the long-standing debate around Canadian deference to US demands regarding security and defence policy. “Defence against help” is a concept that suggests Canada does just enough to help defend North America that the United States will not feel compelled to step in and do so on its own (Barry and Bratt, 2008). After 9/11, for instance, Canada’s security and intelligence agencies adjusted their practices to allay American fears over border security amid the persistent belief that Canada provided an avenue for terrorists to infiltrate the United States (Lennox, 2007), a prospect Haglund (2010: 201) described as “the only conceivable challenge to the [Canada-US] security community.” The argument presented here suggests other challenges are possible but also points to the strategic failure of defence against help, since being characterized as a national security threat is precisely the outcome that Canada’s alignment with US national security priorities is intended to avoid. But defence against help nonetheless illustrates the importance of ensuring American confidence in Canada’s security and defence capabilities. Canadian participation in the war in Afghanistan and the global war on terror illustrates how keeping the confidence of US policy makers is seen as a key Canadian national interest (Stein and Lang, 2008). But Canadian officials determining that the national interest lies in supporting the United States differs from a US president coercing a particular outcome from Canada. The fact that Canada declined to participate in high stakes US undertakings such as invading Iraq or North American ballistic missile defence without US retaliation illustrates the difference between a junior partner who typically supports its ally and a weaker state whose powerful neighbour employs coercion to achieve its preferred outcome.

A full examination of the alternative conceptual possibilities for the relationship beyond a PSC is outside the scope of this article, though this discussion is being taken up by scholars in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and impending 2020 election (Dupeyron, 2020; Lagassé and Vucetic, 2020). But while a change of president would improve bilateral relations, it is unlikely to repair the damage caused by Trump, for at least three reasons. First, Trump reflects a segment of popular opinion that embraces “America First” and will continue to exert a nativist influence on US policy. A Trump electoral defeat is more likely to inflame than deflate such opinion-holders and exacerbate legislative and state demands by Republicans for tighter borders, restricted immigration, trade tariffs and international isolationism, all of which harm Canada *and* Canadians’ idea of the United States.

Second, Trump has influenced the organizational culture and leadership of the US government. Notably, agencies such as the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Office of the US Trade Representative responsible for important aspects of the Canada-US relationship have embraced and implemented the most divisive aspects of the president’s agenda, not least of which include the steel and aluminum tariffs and proposed militarization of the Canadian border. Conversely, agencies conducive to restoring good bilateral

relations, such as the State Department and Environmental Protection Agency, have been gutted for impeding the president's agenda (Thrush and Davenport, 2017). Institutional memory and organizational culture in those departments that also consider continental and Canadian interests when formulating US policy have thus been undermined. These influences on US government culture and personnel will endure regardless of who takes office next. Given that much Canada-US security cooperation occurs at the technical level between agencies, the Trump presidency's influence on the American security and defence bureaucracy will colour the relationship for years to come. Conversely, the president's tendency to divulge classified information on live television has produced Canadian concerns over intelligence sharing and cooperation with the United States (Freeze, 2017). On both sides of the border, Trump has thus influenced bureaucratic actors whose cooperation undergirds the technical aspects of the Canada-US PSC.

The third reason why Trump's influence will likely endure for Canada-US relations is that PSCs are inherently reciprocal; no matter what happens in the United States, Canadians will remember what can happen when Americans elect the wrong kind of leader. Unlike past instances when the US president was unpopular among Canadians (as was the case with George W. Bush), Trump has been actively harmful for Canada. His administration has demonstrated that Americans have the capacity to elect—and maintain relatively strong support for—a president who casually, deliberately and repeatedly harms the national security of the United States' closest friend and ally. Canadians, in short, may have learned that they cannot rely upon the United States to secure their interests. So while the Trump presidency will end sooner or later, “the Trump challenge to the norms and conventions of the Canada–US relationship, and to some of the shared institutions that mark this bilateral relationship as a ‘special relationship’ . . . will continue even after Trump leaves office” (Sands and Carment, 2019: 293).

This article has examined how the Canada-US PSC has been damaged by the divergence of shared identities and interests, loss of trust and democratic decline in the United States during the Trump presidency. In some ways, it reframes a core preoccupation of Canadian foreign policy studies: how to characterize Canada's relationship with the United States. My argument does not support any one perspective on Canada's relative power and status in the world but suggests that scholars and policy makers should hesitate before relying on Canada's unique relationship, military alliance or North American partnership with the United States as a dependable factor for Canada's security and influence in the world. Canada will no doubt continue to support many US security and defence policies, but if it can be labelled a threat to the United States, and the United States pursues policies that harm Canada's interests, then security community does not accurately characterize the relationship. If the United States considers its interests relative to issues such as free trade, great power competition or a global pandemic in terms that render harm to Canada and Canadians, then the two clearly lack a common security culture. And if the two societies were not part of a PSC, and the United States pursued its own perceived interests without consideration for Canada or the commonality of the North American continent, it would be difficult not to consider US power as a potential threat to Canada.

In the future, inter-state war between Canada and the United States remains unlikely, but not necessarily because of the durability of the Canada-US PSC. Decades of divergence in values and social attitudes have collided with the reality of a US president who has taken actions that harm Canada, both intentionally and unintentionally. Despite its history, there is no guarantee that the Canada-US relationship will remain rooted in shared identity, mutual trust and a commitment to democracy. More apropos may be Thucydides' timeless claim that in international politics, the powerful do what they will and the weak suffer what they must. As the weaker state, ultimately Canada will suffer what it must from its erstwhile ally, but such a relationship should not obscure the conditions of Canadian compliance nor be allowed to disguise itself in the normative garb of a security community. Without the foundations of a PSC, non-war relations in North America would reflect basic realities of power that favour the United States. This need not come to pass: the bonds between Canadians and Americans remain relatively strong, and their governments still possess the deepest bilateral relationship in the world. In time, shared identity and mutual trust may be restored. But the shifts in social values, collective identities, national interests and democratic institutions bode poorly for the maintenance of a security community that serves both states' interests. These processes began before the election of Donald Trump, but his presidency has damaged the Canada-US PSC at every turn. For the security community to endure, its foundations will require sustained rehabilitation by whomever leads America next.

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