

In Search of an Identity:

The Case for Niche Diplomacy in Canadian Foreign Policy

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In the period after the Second World War, Canada emerged as a major power in international affairs. Canada had one of the largest militaries in the world and was economically strong due to the demand for raw materials during the war. This period was the epitome of strength for Canada in international affairs. Canada was strong as a nation and played a leading role in the development of the United Nations framework. Since then, however, Canada's strength and role in international affairs has steadily declined, restraining its capabilities and the avenues that Canada can pursue in foreign policy. Throughout this decline, Canada has followed the major trends of international relations including multilateralism and structural adjustment. In recent years, there has been a strong tendency towards unilateralism and occupation spearheaded by the United States in its involvement in Iraq and its pattern of action outside of the major international organizations. Canada, however, does not have the power and capabilities that the United States and other major powers have, and as such, it cannot continue to behave in the same manner. Canada's foreign policy must reflect its international capabilities. The purpose of this paper is not to condemn current actions undertaken by the Canadian government nor argue for specific engagements, but rather to propose a means of addressing Canada's international identity crisis. Currently, the best option for Canada would be to model its foreign policy to reflect the concept of niche diplomacy. Niche diplomacy effectively reflects Canada's international strength and national identity and provides an avenue for the most benefit for both Canada and its diplomatic partners.

WHERE CANADA EXISTS

Canada's position in the hierarchy of international affairs largely influences what course Canada can pursue in foreign affairs. It would be a far-fetched argument to suggest that Canada is a global

superpower and it is arguable whether or not Canada is even a regional power. As a country, Canada is stuck in that "grey area" between the great powers and the non-powers. Canada is a "middle power", an identity it has played for quite some time. A middle power is, "in its most basic form, a state which is neither a great power nor a small power. 'Middle power' is therefore a relative term".¹ This presence, as is the case for almost all states, is determined through the economic and military strength a state has, and the ensuing diplomatic strength that is afforded by the previous two areas. However, "by definition, today's so called middle powers are not really middle powers, and the true middle powers do not want to be regarded as such".² This realization refers to the fact that many states hold positions of influence within the international community and the UN Framework that are not legitimate reflections of their current capabilities and influence. The allocation of permanent seats and vetoes in the UN Security Council is an excellent example of this. The council continues to be structured in terms of the global power structure of 1945, when the five Second World War victors cemented their privileged status; "virtually the only current common factor among the five is that all are legal nuclear weapons states under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty".³ Under-represented are new powers like Brazil, India and South Africa in favour of the old powers, of which some are more like middle powers now (e.g. Great Britain, France).

The reality is that Canada is neither an economic power nor a military power. Jennifer Welsh explains that her home country:

"Lacks the economic and military capabilities of a great power. We do not seek superiority over our neighbours, nor do we inspire jealousy and suspicion. But neither are we on the bottom rungs of the international hierarchy. To put it another way, while we cannot do some of the things

¹ Adam Chapnick. "The Middle Power." *Canadian Foreign Policy* 7. 1999. 73-82.

² Ibid.

³ J. Mohan Malik. "Security Council Reform: China Signals Its Veto." *World Policy Journal*, 22(1). 2005. 19-29.

that great powers can do, we can do things that smaller powers cannot".⁴

Existing in the middle, Canada has been able to play truly influential roles in international affairs. At times, it has been able to play above its weight class, figuratively speaking, and at other times has been unable to sway the type of influence to get things done.

As of recent, Canada has been largely representative of the latter of those distinctions. "Canada's population base, and thus its manufacturing infrastructure, is too small and too limited in capability to sustain the living standards of Canadians, including the level of government services necessary not only for a good life, but even for survival. Thus Canada must trade".⁵ This fact does not escape other states in their deliberations with Canada. Canada's dependence on trade decreases its leverage in negotiations. For example, Canada's dependence on trade with the United States for economic survival prevents Canada from taking too strong and determined positions against the US in many debates concerning their relations.

Canada's place is also affected by its strength militarily. "In a world of ever increasing interdependencies, unhampered by Cold War divisions, it is often argued that peacekeeping is no longer a sufficient response and that peacemaking or peace enforcement is now required".⁶ Canada's military, which before 9/11 had been largely structured to fulfill a peacekeeping role (as part of a larger, multilateral force) has fallen out of date due to cut backs, ideological disputes and scandal and, thus, can no longer keep pace with the current needs of a modern military. This becomes a problem for the Canadian state because "the shrinking of Canada's international capabilities directly undermines Canada's ability to protect its

interests and diminishes Canadian sovereignty by limiting Canadian options".⁷

This decrease in power, however, has largely been unrecognised by the Canadian public. Canada is still held to its post-1945 levels of influence by its citizens; influence that no longer exists in the same manner. "The often self-congratulatory and self-serving rhetoric of Canadian involvement in solving the world's many problems increasingly outstrips by far Canada's very limited capacity to use its military to these ends".⁸ The public demands that Canada is held to its previous levels of influence, an image that Canada cannot maintain with its current strength in international affairs.

Former Conservative Prime Minister Joe Clark believes "Canada is at risk of losing its international reputation due to the inaction of the Harper government".⁹ While one's agreement with this may be influenced

by political affiliations, any decline of Canada's international strength cannot be ignored. It would be tough to deny "Canada is in need of a place on the world

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stage, having let slip over the past few decades its once well-recognised internationalism".¹⁰ Canada appears to lack a contemporary identity in international affairs that would help to streamline and clarify where exactly Canada exists in the world and how it should act abroad. Gone are the days of

⁷ David J. Bercuson et al. "National Defence, National Interest: Sovereignty, Security and Canadian Military Capability in the Post 9/11 World."

⁸ Dan Middlemiss. "A Military in Support of Canadian Foreign Policy: Some Fundamental Considerations." Paper prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. May, 2003.

⁹ Mary Jo Laforest. "Joe Clark has some 'concerns' about Harper." *The Globe and Mail*. March 13, 2008.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.2008.0313>

¹⁰ Robert S. Barrett. "Composite Diplomacy: Canadian Innovation Amidst Global Uncertainty." *Innovations: A Journal of Politics* 5. 2005. 33-48.

⁴ Jennifer Welsh. *At Home in the World: Canada's Global Vision for the 21st Century*. (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishing. 2004.)

⁵ David J. Bercuson, John Ferris, J.L. Granatstein, Rob Huebert and Jim Keeley. "National Defence, National Interest: Sovereignty, Security and Canadian Military Capability in the Post 9/11 World." Report prepared by the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute for the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. September, 2003.

⁶ Tom Keating and Nicholas Gammer. "The 'new look' in Canada's foreign policy." *International Journal* 48. 1993. 720-748.

the British Commonwealth, the fight against Communism or even Axworthy's human security that served to guide Canadian foreign policies of the past. As such, Canada's position in the world is a topic of great debate. It is uncertain where exactly Canada exists in the hierarchy of nation-states and as such creates problems for Canada when determining how to engage oneself internationally.

Canada's complex situation regarding its place requires a change in how things are done. No longer can it act as if it is still an influential power; the nation possesses neither the economic strength nor the military capabilities to back that position and our sense of righteous morality has been tarnished by scandals like the Somalia Affair. Despite this, Canadians maintain certain expectations that their nation be one of the "good guys" and help to make this world a better place.

WHAT SHOULD CANADA DO?

Canada can, however, rebuild its strength and influence through the use of niche diplomacy. "Niche diplomacy involves concentrating resources in specific areas best able to generate returns worth having rather than trying to cover the field".¹¹ Rather than focusing on engagements in specific theatres where attention and resources are shared amongst a number of areas like security, rebuilding and institutional reform, actors decide to focus on single issues or theme, like the human security agenda championed by Lloyd Axworthy in the 1990's, that transcends traditional concepts of sovereign boundaries. The difference being that the traditional mission-oriented style of diplomacy favours addressing multiple problems in a specific location while niche diplomacy proposes tackling a specific problem or theme in multiple geographic locations.

This strategy "prioritizes the 'economic pillars' of comparative advantage, efficiency, and maximum impact in the national interest rather than broader

human security".¹² These pillars return results that are in the best interests of the country providing the diplomacy and the people who are on the receiving end. Using comparative advantage, where actors choose to concentrate the majority of their energy and resources on the products or processes that will provide them with the greatest returns, states can focus their efforts in the areas that they are best at or most suited to do, providing for a maximum return for the people who receive the diplomatic efforts. Efficiency creates an economically wise pattern of use for the efforts of diplomatic bodies. The less amount of waste that is accumulated in acting abroad, the better for all parties concerned. The recipients need not worry about the social fallout from inefficient operations and the acting body is more willing to act and act more often because they will see quick, tangible returns on their investments and will be able to justify their decisions. Operations must be efficient in order to maintain the support of those at home and abroad to counter arguments against any perception of unjust interference. Lastly, maximum impact is important to foreign policy considerations because, like efficiency, maximum impact reverberates at home and abroad. In both cases, achieving maximum impact creates public support for the mission. Those abroad must see benefit from the foreign efforts to support them. They must be willing to ignore the intrusion into their sovereignty; a goal that becomes much more likely when they see that they benefit from any decrease in their inherent independence. An example of this is the debate over Canada's continuing presence in Afghanistan. Questions, as to the efficiency and effect of the Canadian mission in Kandahar, have arisen due to the continuing insurgency of the Taliban after 7 years. These questions threaten the future of the mission and are largely indicative of the current state of Canadian foreign policy.

For a smaller power, this method of diplomacy has many advantages, which endear its use. These pillars are politically and economically advantageous for the engaging country. Results are favourable for politicians come election time as is economic

¹¹ Andrew F. Cooper. "Niche Diplomacy: A Conceptual Overview." In *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers after the Cold War*, edited by Andrew Cooper, 1-24. (New York: St. Martin's Press. 1997.)

¹² Rosalind Irwin. "Linking Ethics and Security in Canadian Foreign Policy" in *Ethics and Security in Canadian Foreign Policy*, edited by Rosalind Irwin, 3-13. (Vancouver: UBC Press. 2001.)

growth created by foreign investment opportunities. "Niche diplomacy can be best understood as a strategy for achieving particular policy ends. But strategy is not isolated from guiding principles".¹³ States are no longer primarily interested in defending their sovereignty as often as was seen in the past, rather "their concerns have been extended to cover not only economic well-being but a broad range of social issues which are essentially global and interdependent in nature".¹⁴ The growing social, economic and political movement towards globalisation has created a world where issues transcend the sovereign boundaries imposed by men and as such foreign policy must resemble this. Niche diplomacy accounts for this, focusing not on individual states but on issues that are suitable for a nation's capabilities. The niches that states choose to follow reflect functionalism in foreign policy and "functionalism legitimizes the application of issue specific strengths and skills possessed by individual countries".¹⁵

States must focus their energies on what they do best. Foreign policy expert and scholar at the University of Waterloo, Andrew Cooper "implies that niche selection, if not niche diplomacy, takes place in middle powers that might otherwise exhibit different behaviour".¹⁶ This is what defines them from the major powers and those who do not engage in niche diplomacy. "Major powers usually have a broader cultural impact and a larger reservoir of messages and images that they represent and that represent them".¹⁷ In following this path, middle power states can be selective in their foreign policies

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and achieve positive results for all involved, arriving at the pillars previously mentioned.

A further positive aspect of niche diplomacy is that it takes advantage of the growing trend of the democratization of foreign affairs in connection with its domestic sources. The practice of international diplomacy and public policy, "previously an exclusive realm managed by diplomats behind closed doors, is increasingly [being] democratized – citizen activists, NGOs, domestic ministries, private enterprises, academics and other actors, participate directly in foreign policy and form public debates about foreign policy issues in value-based terms".¹⁸ The increased dialogue lets foreign policy reflect the values and beliefs of the citizens

of a nation. Heather Smith argues that "niche diplomacy has the potential to foster internal and external democratization of foreign policy. NGOs and other civil-society actors are integral to many of the recent foreign policy initiatives".¹⁹

In terms of the different forms of diplomatic practice, niche diplomacy fits into the Track II classification of diplomacy. A scholar at the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, Robert S. Barrett, defines that "Track II is often used more generally to refer to the work of professional conflict resolution practitioners engaging in citizen-level diplomacy – a practice typically accomplished by non-governmental organizations (NGOs)".²⁰ By incorporating a wide range of methods and parties, niche diplomacy has a greater chance of being successful. This method involves many different

¹³ Heather A. Smith. "Niche Diplomacy in Canadian Human Rights Policy: Ethics or Economics?" In *Ethics and Security in Canadian Foreign Policy*, edited by Rosalind Irwin, 77-94. (Vancouver: UBC Press. 2001.)

¹⁴ Andrew F. Cooper. "Niche Diplomacy: A Conceptual Overview."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Heather A. Smith. "Niche Diplomacy and Mission-Oriented Diplomatic Behaviour: A Critical Assessment." In *Worthwhile Initiatives*, edited by Andrew Cooper and Geoffrey Hayes, 13-22. (Toronto: Irwin. 2000.)

¹⁷ Jozef Batora. "Multistakeholder Public Diplomacy of Small and Medium-Sized States: Norway and Canada Compared." Paper prepared for the International Conference on Multistakeholder Diplomacy. February 11-13, 2005.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Heather A. Smith. "Niche Diplomacy and Mission-Oriented Diplomatic Behaviour: A Critical Assessment."

²⁰ Robert S. Barrett. "Composite Diplomacy: Canadian Innovation Amidst Global Uncertainty."

parties who gain a stake in the outcomes of the diplomatic missions; their interests providing the initiative to make sure those efforts are successful.

Niche diplomacy, thus, emphasizes efficiency and return while providing positive outcomes for all those involved; all traits very much suited to middle powers.

WHY CANADA SHOULD DO IT

If Canada is in fact a middle power and niche diplomacy is the diplomatic tool of the middle power, then it is logical that Canada should embrace this method in guiding its future foreign affairs. However, the case for Canada's pursuit of niches is stronger than just this logic. Niche diplomacy is suited to the national identity that Canada possesses and reflects this internationally.

Canada can use its multicultural identity to develop its niche in foreign affairs. Recently, former Prime Minister Joe Clark has said that "the problems facing the world involve conflict between people who come from different cultures and belief systems and yet have to live together. He said Canada deals with that essential diversity better than any other country".²¹ Canada's population is one of, if not the most diverse nation in the world. Canada's "immigration and refugee policy, combined with [its] changing ethnic makeup, constitutes one of these key drivers. Canada has quite literally opened itself to the world, and many parts of the world live within our boundaries".²² This identity endows Canada with a unique ability to that few others can profess to have. Canada can argue that it can be objective when dealing with multicultural issues, a claim that is important when playing the role of an objective mediator in cultural disputes. These types of conflicts are becoming more and more prevalent in world affairs and Canada is in the best position to become a leader in solving these types of disputes. Canada is "trusted internationally, in a world where it's very important that someone is able to come in and draw others together".²³

Multiculturalism is not the only aspect of the Canadian identity that can be administered by niche diplomacy. Canada is a liberal democracy much like many other states in the Western hemisphere; however Canada's history endears it to many of the developing states. Under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, "Canada came to have the lead [with France] on north-south relations [...] until Ronald Thatcherism put paid to negotiations over a 'new international economic order' in 1981".²⁴ Its history, both as a former colony and as a champion of the south, creates a dialogue that is conducive to the spreading of the liberal democratic ideology; an ideology that Canada has built its identity on. This is something that Canada does well and can be part of its niche. One vital aspect of

"Canadian foreign policy today is simply being what we are: a particular, and highly successful, model of liberal democracy. Our model values pluralism, as reflected in our federal structure, our official policy of bilingualism, and our immigration and refugee policy. It prizes mixed government, by balancing legislative decision-making with an activist court and a robust human rights culture."²⁵

Canada's presence as a liberal democracy supports its multicultural identity, protecting equality and freedom.

Canada is a beacon of light for countries struggling with cultural conflicts. Canadian niche diplomacy could address this, emphasizing the creation of democratic processes and the protection of human rights. Former Member of Parliament and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bill Graham, has argued, "human rights and democracy are not just Canadian values, but are universal values shared by the rest of the world. Our foreign policy should not be understood as an exportation of Canadian values,

²¹ Mary Jo Laforest. "Joe Clark has some 'concerns' about Harper."

²² Jennifer Welsh. *At Home in the World: Canada's Global Vision for the 21st Century*.

²³ Mary Jo Laforest. "Joe Clark has some 'concerns' about Harper."

²⁴ David M. Malone. "Canadian Foreign Policy Post-9/11: Institutional and Other Challenges." Paper prepared for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. May, 2003.

²⁵ Jennifer Welsh. *At Home in the World: Canada's Global Vision for the 21st Century*.

but rather as our contribution to the common goals of humanity".²⁶

Furthermore, niche diplomacy makes sense for the Canadian government. In the eyes of the politicians, "the government views Canada as 'a middle power with limited military might, well placed to wield soft power, based on the idea that knowledge and information confer international influence'".²⁷ Niche diplomacy embraces the use of soft power to obtain

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its objectives and it is appealing to the policy makers in Ottawa. "It is a strategy that is informed by the dominant idea of the day, managed internationalism, and it supports the prevailing norms of the international system".²⁸ Canada

does not have the capabilities to engage in forceful or "hard power" diplomacy, which has become negatively perceived in the United Nations framework. Unilateral intervention, in the style of larger powers, is not a viable or even realistic option for Canada as we do not have the ability to even attempt this avenue. Niche diplomacy accounts for these weaknesses in the Canadian context and provides a more suitable strategy for Canadian diplomats to follow. Furthermore, niche diplomacy is a fiscally responsible form of foreign policy in a time of limited spending. In 2007, Canada's percentage of Gross National Income devoted to development assistance was 0.28%, far off from the set international goal of 0.7% (OECD). With so few resources to work with, Canada must strive to get the most quality out of their ODA that they can; a

goal that niche diplomacy can assist with. "Niche diplomacy is premised on the view that, in an era of fiscal restraint, Canada must make some hard choices if its foreign policy is to remain credible".²⁹ By focusing on a specific niche in foreign policy, the Canadian government would maximize the output received from its limited resources.

Employing this type of strategy would be a marked difference from the type of foreign policy that has guided the nation through recent years. Since entering Afghanistan in 2001, Canada has become engaged in a mission that is neither strategically wise nor reflective of the Canadian identity. This mission in Afghanistan has come to dominate much of Canadian foreign policy thought. Canada has essentially staked its international image on the success of that mission; a wager that is beginning to appear less and less like a wise move. Rather than focus on the ideals that have been successful for Canada in the past, the mission in Afghanistan has become more like an occupation than a peacekeeping mission. Resources are becoming over-stretched and less effective, the financial cost is rising, public support is waning, and the chances that a favourable outcome will be reached are diminishing. This type of commitment to specific missions and not just a single niche or two is putting Canada in a risky position in world affairs. The Canadian international presence is not suited for this type of commitment.

Thus, Canada should adopt niche diplomacy as its foreign policy because it is suitable for Canada's multicultural and liberal democratic identity and because it is an attractive choice for Canada's government.

CONCLUSION

Canada must make a decision; what will the Canadian identity be in international affairs? This decision must be grounded upon a coherent and realistic analysis of Canadian interests and capabilities. Canada may have the broad interests of a major power but not the necessary capabilities to pursue those interests.

²⁶ Rights and Democracy. "A Canadian Foreign Policy Founded Upon the Bedrock of Human Rights, Democratic Development, Renewed Multilateralism, and the Sharing of Growth and Prosperity." Rights & Democracy's Contribution to the Dialogue on Foreign Policy Proposed by the Honourable Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, May 1, 2003.

²⁷ David Bashow (L.Col). "Reconciling the Irreconcilable? Canada's Foreign and Defence Policy Linkage." *Canadian Military Journal* Spring, 2000. 23-32.

²⁸ Heather A. Smith. "Niche Diplomacy and Mission-Oriented Diplomatic Behaviour: A Critical Assessment."

²⁹ Heather A. Smith. "Niche Diplomacy in Canadian Human Rights Policy: Ethics or Economics?"

Niche diplomacy offers the prospect of furthering do not have abundant resources to allocate to foreign affairs. It advocates the use of "soft power" and expertise to develop constructive relationships with diplomatic partners for the benefit of all involved.

Canada should adopt the use of niche diplomacy in developing its foreign policies. It is a middle power that requires the influence of a major power despite the resources of a smaller power. This agenda is served by niche diplomacy's compatibility with the Canadian identity. Canada is a multicultural, liberal democracy that has positive relationships with many developing and developed states. It espouses

one's interests while catering to those nations that democracy and equality to those willing to hear and possesses a more than respectable record in international involvement. This is Canada's niche and should become the forefront of foreign policy directions. The Canadian government and its citizens would be well served by this policy direction. It effectively utilizes the resources that Canada does possess while providing an international identity that Canadians can be proud of. The logic behind this is convincing and the prospects for success enticing. Canada must address its position in international affairs and niche diplomacy is the way to accomplish this.

Projected Inaction: Tripartite Canadian Foreign Policy and Climate Change-Induced Forced Migration

Laurel Carlton

There is "high agreement and much evidence" that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have caused the observed increases in global average temperature since the mid-20th century. This 'global warming' is resulting in "abrupt or irreversible" environmental changes¹, including melting permafrost, increasingly extreme temperatures, rising sea levels, and increased natural and humanitarian disasters.² As the global average temperature is projected to continue rising, these consequences are expected to worsen.³ Ironically,

the world's poorest, those who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions, will bear the immediate brunt of climate change despite being the least equipped to adapt.⁴ Consequently, climate change is expected to reinforce global inequalities, "exacerbate[ing] inequities in health status and access to adequate food, clean water, and other resources".⁵

As the effects of climate change set in, they will challenge many communities' "adaptive capacities," overwhelming some and destroying the carrying capacity of their land, ultimately driving mass displacement.⁶ Some effects, like natural disasters,

that the global average temperature will rise by less than 1.5°C by 2100 (IPCC 2007b:12).

⁴ UNDP. "Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World." *Human Development Report 2007/2008*. United Nations Development Programme. 2007.

http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf. 43-

5. Nicholas Stern. "Part II: Impacts of climate change on growth and development (Chapters 3-6)." *Stern Review Report on the Economics of Climate Change*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2006.) 20-40.

⁵ IPCC. "Summary for Policymakers." In *Climate Change 2001: Synthesis Report*. Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2001. <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/climate-changes-2001/synthesis-spm/synthesis-spm-en.pdf>. 12.

⁶ Oli Brown. "Climate change and forced migration: Observations, projections and implications." *Human Development Report Occasional Paper*. Geneva: International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2007. 12.

¹ IPCC. "Summary for Policymakers." In *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*. Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2007a

http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf. 13.

² IPCC. "Summary for Policymakers." In *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis*. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Edited by Solomon, S., D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K.B. Averyt, M. Tignor and H.L. Miller. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007b.

<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg1/ar4-wg1-spm.pdf>. 5.

³ The International Panel on Climate Change estimates suggest an increase of 2 to 4.5°C by 2100, estimating that it is "very unlikely"