

Canada and the Crisis of Middle Powers

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If the superpowers are, as is commonly suggested, passing through a time of crisis, so inevitably are the "middle powers," for the states that for twenty-five years have been collectively but erratically referred to as middle powers are groping for their place in a system determined by the giants. At San Francisco in 1945 the middle powers seemed to have found a mission in frustrating the great power determination to brook as little interference as possible in their ordering of world politics. When the great powers fell apart, the middle-power front was also broken. Its members found their niches in alliance with the great powers or in a status they called nonalignment. Alignment and nonalignment make sense, however, only in relation to the great powers' division.

We middle men chafed at our dependence, but, for the most part, flourished and survived nicely within the framework of mutual deterrence, of Pax Americana or Pax Sovietica-Americana. Now that framework is in transition. If the superpowers lose their grip or if, for that matter, they act together to tighten their grip on the system, do we resume our San Francisco stance? The prospects force us out of our habitual rhetoric to honest self-examination. How much do we really want to float free? Do we want to revive the discredited illusion of universal collective security? If not, what can we do for the cause of peace that makes sense? Assuming we are ready to play a real part in maintaining international security, what can we do when technology has largely restricted the arms race to the top two or maybe three? There was a time when the concepts of alliance and collective security gave us rational purpose, but they no longer seem so rational. If we resume our compulsive and automatic resistance to the superpowers, is that in their interest? or ours? or the world's? Finally, as

the unfrozen issues of international relations become more economic than military, maybe we have to rethink what we mean by "superpower" and "middle power."

The concept of middle power came out of a peculiar history. It is a term of convenience with no standing in international agreements or organizations. It is subject to a confusing ambiguity, its significance is in a play on words. It may or may not have a future.

Although the concept was recognized in the structure of the League of Nations more clearly than in the United Nations, the term middle power became current at the end of the Second World War. It was an unofficial way of describing countries which did not have the veto rights of great powers in the U.N. but could still contribute more than small powers. Sweden, Brazil and Canada were clearly middle powers, but the term was frequently extended to include a country like India which, although enormous in population, was neither economically nor militarily a great power.

Canadians embraced the term more enthusiastically than others, arguing in 1945 that there must be no permanent right of the great powers to privilege and veto in all aspects of international relations. The strong military powers should be accorded rights in line with their function in the Security Council only. Countries with special colonial responsibilities would have their place in the Trusteeship Council, and it was hoped that countries with economic power would have special status in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the functional organizations. The rule would be, "To each according to his capacities." Geographical and regional pressures, however, soon succeeded in overwhelming the rule. Powers of middling military strength were not even recognized as having a greater right to election to the Security Council, as Canada had insisted. Nevertheless, the persisting value of the concept, at least

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for those who professed it, was that it defined for themselves a sensible attitude to responsibility. They did not presume to be great military powers, but they knew they had duties beyond those of the small and weak. They would demand a larger voice than the great were disposed to accord them, and they would earn it through services in the cause.

Enter the ambiguity. Many issues—Kashmir, Indonesia, Palestine, for examples—arising out of the break-up of empires required states or individuals with less vested interests to play the role of intermediaries. The middle-sized powers filled the bill because, while they did not have interests or power enough to be threatening, they did have sufficient diplomatic and military resources to mediate conflicts. The term “middle” originally denoted size, but now took on the connotation of intermediary. Countries which proved useful as intermediaries, however, soon included Norway, Ireland and Tunisia, states which are hardly medium in resources or population. The term middle power is no doubt ambivalent; some think it ambivalent to the point of being meaningless.

The 1970's promise only to intensify the ambivalence. Now that the British and Germans—but never, of course, the French—are informally referring to themselves as middle powers, it is time to take a new look at the hierarchy. Instead of the great powers designated by the Security Council in the 1940's, we now seem to have this lineup: two superpowers; China, which is *sui generis*; Britain and France, still recognized as great powers in the Security Council but far from super; Japan, an economic if not a military power; India, a great power in political influence; and Brazil moving up fast. In economics we have, for example on monetary questions, the “Group of Ten,” which includes among the financial great powers some of the classical middle powers of the postwar period.

If the term middle power means anything useful now it is probably with reference to countries like Yugoslavia or Sweden which have by nature or situation intermediary capacities. Intermediation, however, has become much more *ad hoc*. As the concept of world-embracing alignments declines, nonalignment becomes more regional and specific. One hopes, of course, that as many nations as possible will cherish their capacities and responsibilities. On the other hand, the idea that certain countries are suited by nature for this role in most if not all world conflicts may be of diminishing value. Even Canada, which has clung to this mission as its best definition of foreign policy, is turning away from the idea of mediation. A new generation is bored with the role and the reputation that goes with it. Also, since Canada is now a major economic power, it is less likely to play the part of disinterested mediatory in the great commercial and monetary conflicts of this dec-

ade. It is not easy, however, to escape the habits of a generation or the expectations of the international system. Prime Minister Trudeau, shortly after expressing skepticism about the role of “helpful fixer,” was drawn into mediating between Britain and the African states over arms to South Africa and the status of Rhodesia. Being viewed as a professional mediator has its drawbacks, but it is finally mediation that keeps the planet from blowing up.

Before we discard the concept of middle power we should consider its past contributions to world politics as well as its failures. It should be emphasized that, although the middle powers did struggle at San Francisco to establish their second-class voice in the hierarchy, the mediatory role was more thrust upon them than sought. The role was largely defined *ex post facto*. The issues that arose in the United Nations required an intermediary force. The great powers persuaded the middle men to act, and the victims of conflict welcomed their interventions. Greece, Indonesia, Lebanon and Indochina are among the better known interventions, but the functions of the middle powers (in the late fifties *The Economist* called them the “Sanitation Bloc”) were demonstrated persistently if less visibly in the regular work of the U.N. and other international bodies: getting together sponsors for compromise resolutions, lobbying to avoid dangerous confrontation, collaborating with the efforts of the Secretary General, and in a thousand ways seeking to reduce tension. It can be argued that, insofar as it can be worked, the middle powers made the U.N. work. They made possible the “peacekeeping” which emerged in the fifties as one way the U.N. could act to prevent the spread of conflict. To be sure, these were Chapter VI functions of conciliation rather than Chapter VII functions of enforcement, but they were the best that could be done.

Or were they? Perhaps peacekeeping, while it dampened immediate conflicts, prevented settlements. It could be argued that peacekeeping has prevented for over twenty years a settlement in Kashmir, whereas the sharp military surgery of the Indian Government in 1971 made a settlement possible in East Bengal. But such logic is perilous. The wars that did not take place are never as vivid as the conflicts that continue; a strong case remains for the policy of damping brush fires during an inflammatory period in the world's history. In any case, the middle powers were doing what the great powers and a strong majority of U.N. members wanted them to do. The instinct of the United Nations to interpose a mediatory force in any conflict is deeply rooted. While less often practiced in recent years, another conflict could revive the process instantaneously—particularly a conflict that powers which have in principle disliked peacekeeping want to have extinguished.

The middle-power function was not confined to the major councils of the U.N. The same practices have pertained in NATO, the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth. The middle-power function is also evident in the disarmament negotiations in Geneva. It is sometimes hard to preserve a distinction between middle powers and nonaligned powers, since middle powers, whether aligned or not, have some responsibility to restrain superpower assumptions which threaten the legitimate interests of the weak. Italy and Canada, for examples, neither of which could be called nonaligned, have frequently joined with Third World forces to press the nuclear powers at Geneva. They ganged up to pressure and defeat their betters in securing the admission of new members to the U.N. in 1955, and perhaps they deserve some credit for getting Peking seated in 1971 when both superpowers had reason to be less than enthusiastic. (There have, of course, been other occasions when the so-called African-Asian bloc has enforced its will, but that is something different from middlepowerism.)

If in the age of SALT there is a resurgence of superpower authority, a coalescence of all lesser powers may become a more frequent phenomenon; the coalition might also include European powers with veto rights, nervous or jealous of the presumptions of Washington and Moscow. But such schematizations should not be pushed too far. Just how the antagonism to superpower domination felt by Britain, France or Germany might be harmonized with the not very similar feelings of, say, Tanzania, Uruguay or Rumania is hard to envision. Of course, Western Europe itself might become a superpower. The greater danger, however, is that the members of the European Economic Community, incapable of the discipline of a single voice, will use the "voice of Europe" theme for blackmail while refusing to accept the responsibilities of a unified superpower. One unhappy consequence of this pretense is that the authentic voices of some very useful European middle powers will be silenced. The international community would be the loser, for it needs conscientious middle powers more than it needs a new superpower—especially an unreliable superpower.

At least one of the superpowers is going through a devastating examination of conscience. The citizens of the middle powers should follow suit. A certain moral arrogance has crept into the concept of middle power. That might is not right all would agree—but neither is weakness. Middle powers are middle powers because they are weaker, not because they are more virtuous. Many of them (and I think especially of my own countrymen) boast that they have no imperial aims, they threaten no one, and therefore they are widely loved. But they forget that they threaten no one because they are incapable of doing so. Stated so bluntly,

this is too harsh a judgment, for middle powers have indeed shown judgment, objectivity and dedication. Nonetheless, the basic difference between us and the great powers is functional rather than moral.

Among the less pleasant psychological manifestations of middlepowerism, all too evident in Canada at present, is the "David versus Goliath complex." The facile assumption is that David is justified in using any means to beat Goliath simply because Goliath is a giant and David is self-evidently on the side of the angels. This attitude is generally encouraged by U.N. Assembly rhetoric, and it is at least more understandable when proclaimed by very small and weak powers, although it is of doubtful validity even then. It is thoroughly unwarranted and undignified in the case of middle powers which are, in relation to the world at large, rich and greedy. The Canadian reputation for good sense and proportion has been threatened by an obsessive chauvinism which has taken hold even among socialist and liberal circles where one customarily expects expansive internationalism. Resistance to Americanism masquerading as internationalism is entirely justified. However, an obsession with the need to protect our interests in competition with a very powerful neighbor seems, to an articulate minority of Canadians, to justify a policy of national self-interest in which we lose sight of our responsibilities in the wider world. We have more land and resources and coastline per capita than any other country in the world, but when it comes to the protection and extension of our coastal waters, our fish, our seabed and our protective tariffs we tend to behave in an aggressive manner more appropriate to a developing nation in Africa. Fortunately, Canadians are not aggressive enough by disposition to sustain this posture, and the government has for the most part resisted these pressures. Whatever the future of middlepowerism, most Canadians still realize that a reputation for fair-mindedness remains their most valuable asset.

An additional temptation for middle powers is to cling to the cold war which made us. It is a greater temptation for the nonaligned, because changing alignments undermine the very concept of nonalignment by which they defined themselves. Dependent countries may be even more attached to the cold war because of their notable success in getting support by playing one side off against the other. It is easy to exaggerate this temptation, but it calls for vigilance. A good world citizen should, for example, watch the Peking-Washington rapprochement with relief and enthusiasm. Some countries might be excused a few unworthy *arrière-pensées*. Scandinavian and Eastern European countries which have been important as messengers and interpreters may find themselves unemployed. While Canada did not enter into diplomatic relations with Peking in 1970 in order to mediate between Peking and Washington, there is no doubt that Ottawa had some worthy hopes of

helping to heal that breach. Mr. Nixon, however, got to Peking even before Mr. Trudeau.

Canada has long had something of a "linch pin" fixation. It once saw itself as the interpreter between Britain and the United States, but Messrs. Churchill and Roosevelt put that idea to rest many years ago. There is much to be said for renouncing bridge-building as a national profession. But something worse could replace it. The need of lesser states for a mission may be deplored but it can't be ignored.

The healthier aspect of the new Canadian nationalism is a determination to be ourselves, not to be judged as extensions of Britain, France or the United States. The mood is caught in a popular Quebec song, "*Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays; c'est l'hiver*"—sung not regretfully but exultantly. Such a mood hardly promotes international brokerage as a national mission, however. Burgeoning nationalism is a volatile force that can turn swiftly in various directions. With the Canadian GNP approaching \$100 billion, we are tempted to a hard self-assertion that could spawn its own brand of middle-power imperialism. Foreigners, Americans in particular, can help turn Canadian nationalism sour by deploring it. Americans have a habit of disparaging any nationalism except their own as emotionalism, of assuming that nation-states, except their own, are anachronisms—an assumption that has in the past decade become one of the more anachronistic clichés of our time. What Canadians—and other middle powers—need from abroad is encouragement of their better instincts, of self-confidence and a moderate, medium but inspiring sense of mission. Such a mission must be unique, appropriate, discrete. It can be complementary or even supplementary, but it must not be just a matter of pitching in and sharing the work that a great power has defined for itself. That is what the Australians did in Vietnam, and it is not a precedent they or others will want to follow.

Fortunately for Canada, as for most other middle powers, our first national interest is in a world order that secures the greatest combination of peace and prosperity for all. Our secondary interests are competitive. Our interests are in freedom of the seas and of commerce and in the stability that comes not from conserving the status quo but from controlled change and development. We need not see foreign policy as a zero-sum game. There is no basic incompatibility of interest between us and the large or small, developed or underdeveloped countries, although this assumption is much less clear to those for whom the present is much less satisfactory.

Narrower conceptions of national interest, however, are bound to assert themselves, and the very high percentage of land and resources per capita in Canada compared with other countries in a crowded world will put our large-mindedness to a severe test. Economics increasingly dominates world politics, and

our responsibilities for constructive leadership are enormous and increasing. As for matters of security, our responsibilities are probably decreasing. The technology and exorbitant costs of fleets, planes and missiles reduce the military options of middle powers beyond peacekeeping, relief and patrolling our frontiers. In a missile age even our real estate is less essential for bases. Our military contribution through multilateral alliances once seemed sensible, but the utility of such alliances is unclear beyond the immediate future. NATO, for example, may become primarily an instrument for maintaining equilibrium in Europe in order to counterbalance the Warsaw Pact. Our role in international security will be more and more economic or diplomatic, and thus our power depends less on armed might than on our GNP and our wisdom in international policies.

Meanwhile, we should try not to be inconsistent in our tensions with the great powers. It is true that most of us recognized early the disastrous American miscalculation in Vietnam, but few of us recognized the general responsibility for a situation into which the United States so wrongheadedly plunged. We foreign friends seem unable to make up our minds whether the United States is a bogey man or a fairy godfather, whether we want Americans to pack up, go home and stop bothering us, or whether we want them to intervene all over the world in favor of the good guys—or at the very least to accept our volatile conceptions of which guys are at the moment good and bad.

We need some rigorously honest thinking about Pax Americana, or whatever one chooses to call an international system marked by a considerable, although limited, United States hegemony. The sensible response is obvious. Pax Americana may have provided some stability in the postwar years, but it is inequitable, untenable and, at any rate, its *raison d'être* has been destroyed in Vietnam. It must be replaced by a world order in which power and authority are shared by the strong and the weak in fair proportion. Americans and non-Americans can all agree about that. But how do we get there?

We are where we are because the United States acted as trustee for world authority while other powers were gathering their resources. That is the creation at which Dean Acheson thought he was present. We have learned some hard lessons since 1945. We have learned, of course, that even the most benevolent superpower cannot for long distinguish between its own and the international interest. The rest of us have also learned how comfortable and inexpensive it can be to leave the basic structure of world order to the superpowers. This is not the customary statement of gratitude to the United States for generously defending us, for one cannot be sure whether she has been defending us against our own or her own enemies. We are protected not by one

superpower but by the system of mutual deterrence. The point is that we lesser powers have discovered distinct advantages in a system wherein we had to maintain only a minimum police force and had to accept no responsibility except that of watchdog in the critical decisions about missiles and fleets and in the dilemmas of intervention. We have made two efforts to implement the principle of universal collective security. We have been disposed to blame the great powers for their failure, but we know in our hearts that the principle was unsound. In the new constellation we shall, for better or worse, be more on our own and without the easy concept of alliance that gave us a definition of our role and some share in policy-making.

So long as we have superpowers, most Canadians want the United States to be a superpower. Of course we might want to get rid of the superpowers, but not one at a time. A little isolationism in the United States would be a good thing. The U.S. ought to rationalize its commitments, to give up trying to do the impossible in Asia, to stop trying to manage Europe and Latin America and the world at large. But the United States has little need now of our advice to do just that. We should be very careful to avoid driving the U.S. into isolationism. We must appeal to the benevolent, internationalist spirit which is the persistent greatness of the United States. To play that large-spirited role, the U.S. must remain strong and respected, and we must respect its need to remain strong, even militarily. We may not like the pretensions of the U.S. Navy, but if there are going to be superpower patrols of the Seven Seas—and there are—we would much rather there be more than one world-girdling fleet and that one of them be American. The U.S. must keep its place in the arms equilibrium in order to play a forceful role in the constant effort to scale down arms all around.

To say that the middle powers should be the conscience of mankind is presumptuous only if we presume to be its exclusive custodians. Because our specific national interests are rarely engaged directly in international conflicts, we are less subject to internal pressures than are the great powers, and we ought to, even if we don't, maintain more balanced perspectives. It is always hard for Samaritans to avoid being Pharisees. We in Canada and Sweden and other middle powers are encouraged by anxious citizens of the United States to act as the conscience of mankind because we haven't their power and their temptations. We have our own. Pettiness is a sin like overweening pride. Still, virtue may be less costly for us. It is hard to take seriously the idea of urbanized twentieth-century Canada as the new Walden Pond, but we do have a duty to give sanctuary, for example. That includes sanctuary to some refugees who may be imposters. Contrary to Americans, who view it as an unfriendly act, it is not as a judgment on U.S. policy in Vietnam that Canada ad-

mits deserters and draft-dodgers. It is in simple accordance with the historic and honorable principle of sanctuary which the United States and other liberal powers have always themselves respected in the case of other nations' straying recruits. It is one of many precious principles which have mitigated the severity of the international system; like the conventions of the Red Cross, or white flags or hot lines, it must not be sacrificed for temporary expediency.

We have a right and a duty to offer opinions, privately and publicly, to the great powers and, if necessary, we can combine to put stronger pressure on them. Advice is not effective, however, if it is automatic, cantankerous and hypocritical. Above all, it must be based on our own considered scheme for world security, a calculated consideration of the proper part for the great powers in that structure and a due appreciation of the actions they must take and the resources they must maintain to do what we expect of them. In short, we have to be credible.

In sum, we have reason to fear the superpowers in concert but less reason than we have to fear the hegemony of one or a world without leadership. The superpowers in concert may sacrifice the rights and positions of lesser powers. Some countries—Taiwan, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Israel or Egypt—have grounds for concern. West Europeans and Canadians, lying as they do between the Soviet Union and the United States, should be vigilant, but the advantages for both of superpower accord so far outweigh the dangers that obstruction on our part would be unforgivable. Of course we should seek to have some voice in negotiations, both to protect our national interests and to discourage backsliding, and, if the United States does not want to rouse the grudging spirit in us all, it will make sure that our appropriate participation is respected. The U.S. has set itself a good precedent in its consultation with its NATO partners on the SALT talks; these consultations helped to diminish the antagonism building in Western Europe against superpower bilateralism.

Our relative weaknesses as middle powers also make us perilously dependent on the strengthening of the United Nations system. That system is deeper and broader than the U.N. as an organization; it is a maze of international laws, rules and prescriptions, of international habits and expectations. It is everything implied by the Charter, however imperfectly observed. Its gaps and weaknesses are well known, but its tenacity may be best demonstrated by the fact that, after all these years, the regime of Mao wanted to take its place in that system. The U.N. is threatened by a revived spirit of national assertion, a contempt for world opinion, and for international restraints which are "only" moral. By defying the system, the great powers can do more damage, but middle and lesser powers have also contributed to today's perilous cynicism about world order.