

Bomb Canada

The case for war

JONAH GOLDBERG

It's quite possible that the greatest favor the United States could do for Canada is to declare war on it. No, this isn't a tribute to *South Park*, the TV cartoon that popularized a song—"Blame Canada"—calling for an outright invasion of our northern neighbor. A full-scale conquest is unnecessary; all Canada needs is to be slapped around a little bit, to be treated like a whining kid who's got to start acting like a man. We've done it more than once, and we've threatened it plenty of times. Thomas Jefferson told President Madison that conquering Canada would be "a mere matter of marching." Of course, that advice resulted in the burning of the White House in the War of 1812, but the U.S. still came out ahead. Why would a new war be necessary? The short answer is: *to keep the Canadians from being conquered by the United States*. In effect, it would be a war to keep Canada free. But first some background.

Five decades ago, historian Frank Underhill wrote that the Canadian is "the first anti-American, the model anti-American, the archetypal anti-American, the ideal anti-American as he exists in the mind of God." In a sense this isn't really true. Philosophically and politically, the New Soviet Man was a superior anti-American: He not only hated America but had a blueprint for its replacement. After all, the perfect anti-American must be pro-something else; he must offer a viable alternative to that which he detests.

Canadian anti-Americanism does none of this. It is anti-American by reflex, which is to say that when America goes about its business, Canada flinches and calls this tic "the Canadian way." It was ever thus: The very formation of the Canadian state was, quite literally, a flinch in response to America's muscle-flexing. Canada's 1867 confederation, according to most historians, was the direct result of Canada's not-unfounded fears that the battle-hardened Union Army would turn its sights on Canada the way a still-peckish lion lazily turns on a fat gazelle. The Canadian Mounties, perhaps the most enduring symbol of Canadian pride and rectitude, were created to restrain the tomfoolery of American whiskey traders. They chose their red tunics solely to distinguish themselves from the Union blues of the American cavalry. It may even have been Americans who came up with the Mounties' famous motto, "They always get their man."

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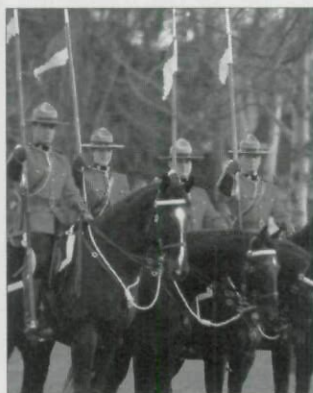
THE SICK MAN OF NORTH AMERICA

Virtually all of Canada's public policies were born out of a studied contrariness to U.S. policies, real or perceived. Canada's disastrous health-care system survives because of three things: vast sums of (poorly spent) money, the limitless patience of Canadian citizens who are regularly willing to wait between four and eight months for necessary surgeries, and the widespread fear that any reform might constitute "Americanization." There's every reason to believe that Canadians would embrace at least a few market reforms—which might, for example, reduce the wait for an MRI from a national median of 12.4 weeks—if only it didn't seem like capitulation to "American-style" health care. But Canada won't even legalize private health insurance as long as this is perceived as Americanization. It is a matter of national pride to have a "different"—i.e., worse-but-more-egalitarian—health-care system than they do south of the border (I mean south of *our* border: Canada has fewer MRI machines per capita than Latin America).

The accusation of wanting to "Americanize" healthcare is a Medusa's head any politician can use to petrify opponents. Mike Harris, the premier of Ontario, declared in a 2001 TV interview: "If we're going to have a universal system . . . we should not be afraid to say, 'Can the private sector run this hospital better? Can they provide this service better? If they can, why should we fear that?'" The reaction from editorialists and the health-care community was one of near-total condemnation—including the charge of "Americanization."

At a conference sponsored by the Fraser Institute, a free-market-oriented Canadian think tank, I listened to a speech by Preston Manning, a founder of the conservative New Alliance Party. I sat next to David Gratzner, a Canadian health-care expert and physician. "This guy is sort of the standard-bearer for free-market conservatives in Canada," Gratzner said, gesturing at Manning, "and he's to the left of Sweden."

Gratzner was serious. Over the last ten years, Sweden has introduced a host of fee-for-service reforms, and the government now permits private health insurance. These moves have reduced waiting periods for equipment and surgeries, by 50 percent in some cases. Canada is the only industrialized democracy in the world that flatly prohibits private insurance of any kind. One wonders why they don't just call it Swedenization and get to work.



Indeed, in the last election Prime Minister Jean Chrétien campaigned on a promise to shut down private MRI clinics that had sprouted up to meet demand. Chrétien argued that such clinics undermine the ideal of universal health care; not a single major party objected. The result was predictable: Hospital parking lots in Michigan are full of Canadian license plates. And in Saskatchewan—the province where Canadian socialized medicine was born—the phone book displays an ad for a clinic in North Dakota. It reads: “Need Health Care Now?”

Health care is only the most prominent example of the Canadian ethos being frozen in the headlights of anti-Americanism. The dysfunctional state of Canadian democracy is partially attributable to Canada’s fears of seeming too American. Preston Manning speaks about the need to permit cross-party coalition building in parliament—yet he is very quick to caution that Canadians don’t want “American-style” politics. But Canada is barely a functioning democracy at all: Its governmental structure, if described objectively, is far more similar to what we would expect in a corrupt African state with decades of one-party rule. Jeffrey Simpson, who might be called the Canadian David Broder, has even written a book entitled *The Friendly Dictatorship*, which sports on its cover a doctored photo of Jean Chrétien in a Pinochet-style military tunic. Simpson argues not only that Chrétien is the “Sun King” of Canada, but that the government itself is designed to be for all intents and purposes a secular monarchy. In Canada, the prime minister appoints the entire senate and has a level of control over members of parliament that would make Tom “The Hammer” DeLay surrender his whip. If one of Chrétien’s fellow Liberals fails to toe the party line, the prime minister has the power to kick him out of the party and even to refuse to ratify his election papers.

THE AMERICANIZATION OF NANOOK?

In fact, nothing would be better for Canada than a rabble-rousing, American-style democracy. It’s not as if Canada had no conservatives: The western region, for example, is remarkably similar to America’s in its laissez-faire attitude, but the stagnant political system simply doesn’t permit the expression of such regional differences at the federal level. Canada’s senate was intended, like America’s, to represent regional interests—but because theirs is appointed by the prime minister, its senators tend to be geriatric cronies appointed as a reward for sycophancy.

One reason Canadians are reluctant to reform this bizarre system is that Canadian culture confuses its quirks with its character. Feeling swamped by U.S. culture, Canadians have stitched together a national identity from whatever’s lying around. They try to plug leaks by restricting foreign ownership of bookstores and mandating huge quotas for homegrown cultural products. Canadians cling to this barely seaworthy raft, and are loath to untie a single plank from it. This explains the famous Canadian radio survey which asked listeners to complete the phrase, “as Canadian as . . .” (looking for something like “as American as apple pie”). The winning response was: “as Canadian as possible, under the circumstances.”

Consider, also, the rant of Molson Joe: “I’m not a lumberjack or a fur trader. I don’t live in an igloo, eat blubber, or own a dogsled. I don’t know Jimmy, Suzie, or Sally from Canada, although I’m certain they’re very nice. I have a prime minister,

not a president. I speak English and French, not American. And I pronounce it ‘about,’ not ‘a-boot.’ I can proudly sew my country’s flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation. And that the beaver is a proud and noble animal. A tuque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch. And it’s pronounced zed. Okay? Not zee. Zed. Canada is the second-largest land mass, the first nation of hockey, and the best part of North America. My name is Joe and I am Canadian.”

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This is the text from a Molson beer commercial that first appeared in movie theaters two years ago. It has made “Molson Joe” a figure of Paul Bunyanesque stature in Canadian life. The public reacted to the ad as if it had announced V-J Day: Schoolkids quoted it; parents loved it; Sheila Copps, Canada’s heritage minister, even showed it at an international conference on American cultural imperialism. This national bout of St. Vitus’s Dance over a mildly amusing beer commercial is a manifestation of Canada’s obsession with its own inferiority complex. Canadian bookshelves groan with self-help books for the Canadian soul: *Why I Hate Canadians*; *Nationalism Without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian*; *Lament for a Nation*; and many dozens of others.

The *Washington Post*’s former Canada bureau chief, Steven Pearlstein—an American—set off a firestorm with an essay noting that Canadian identity is being threatened by America’s overwhelming cultural and economic influence. This point has, of course, been made by one Canadian journalist or another pretty much every day for the last century; but, for some reason, when it appeared in an American paper it was considered an outrage. Pearlstein wrote: “Over the years, Canadians might have coalesced around a shared sense of history but for the fact that they have so little of it they consider worth remembering. The country never fought a revolution or a civil war, pioneered no great social or political movement, produced no great world leader, and committed no memorable atrocities—as one writer put it, Canada has no Lincolns, no Gettysburgs, and no Gettysburg addresses.”

Victoria Dickenson, director of Montreal’s McCord Museum of Canadian History, mouthed the typical reaction when she sarcastically exclaimed: “Gosh, if we could just massacre some people!” Journalists swarmed famous Canadian historians asking them to preen about Canada’s morally superior history—which, Canadians boast, is an evolution, not a revolution. They noted that America—what with slavery and war and all that—had no right to judge Canada.

Given all of the above, it’s not surprising that when you talk to ordinary Canadians—who are, by and large, a wonderfully decent and friendly bunch—they have a ready vocabulary to explain the U.S.-Canada relationship. They talk about how America is Canada’s “big brother” and how, like any younger

sibling, Canada is naturally inclined to find fault with its more accomplished elders. But this metaphor leaves out an important part of the dynamic: Kid brothers normally express their objections not to their big brothers, but to their parents. "He failed his report card!" "He's guilty of 400 years of racism and oppression!" And so on.

For much of Canada's history, its parents could be found in the British Empire. Canada was founded largely by loyalists who rejected America's rebelliousness toward King George; it was never the prodigal son to England, but rather the good son who never left home. Even today, Canadians are vastly more deferential to their government than Americans are; by definition, loyalists do what governments say, rebels don't. With independence, the Canadians were left without a parent to suck up to and with a resented brother who was now their only real protector. Indeed, the U.S. has supplanted dear old Dad as the most important player on the world stage; this new circumstance has prompted Canadians to find a surrogate parent in the United Nations. And that's a real problem, for both Canada and the U.S.

KOFI ANNAN'S NEWFOUND LAND

It is no exaggeration to say that Jean Chrétien is no friend of the United States. Shortly after 9/11 he made a series of idiotic remarks about how America essentially deserved what it got from al-Qaeda: We were attacked because we are too rich and arrogant, and the rest of the world is too poor and humble. He's never backed off those remarks and has even reiterated them. Chrétien's view is the settled opinion of most of Canada's intellectual class.

The Chrétien government believes that the war on terrorism is basically illegitimate. Hence Chrétien's mortifying foot-dragging before visiting Ground Zero; his insistence that it wouldn't be right to outlaw Hezbollah on Canadian soil; and his government's absurd hissy-fit over America's attempt to police its borders against immigrants from terrorist states who try to come through Canada. These policies are partly the product of a longstanding Canadian desire to be the U.N.'s favorite country: Breaking with its immediate family—the U.S. and Britain—Canada has found a new family in the "international community." Canada has internalized the assumptions and mythology of U.N.-ology: not just anti-Americanism but also the belief that Western nations don't need military might anymore. As a consequence, Canada is simply unarmed.

"Canada has never been able to defend itself," says Barry Cooper, a Canadian defense expert. "We've always had to rely on coalitions, be they British, French, or the Americans." The difference today, notes Cooper, is that Canada pretty much has no interest in even contributing to the coalition. Canada's military has an immensely proud tradition and by all accounts Canadian warriors remain an impressive lot, but they are ill-equipped and increasingly under-trained.

Canadians have long talked about how they are a "moral superpower" and a nation of peacekeepers, not warriors. While they were never in fact a moral superpower—when was the last time a dictator said, "We'd better not, the Canadians might admonish us"?—Canadians were at one time a nation of a peacekeepers who helped enforce U.N.-brokered deals around the world (Suez 1956, Congo 1960, etc.). Today, Canada ranks

Number 37 as a peacekeeping nation in terms of committed troops and resources, and it spends less than half the average of the skinflint defense budgets of NATO. Chrétien talks about not sending troops to Iraq; in truth, even if Chrétien wanted to join the Iraq invasion, Canada's role would be like Jamaica's at the Winter Olympics—a noble and heartwarming gesture, but a gesture nonetheless.

Despite Canada's self-delusions, it is, quite simply, not a serious country anymore. It is a northern Puerto Rico with an EU sensibility. Canada has no desire to be anything but the United Nations' ambassador to North America, talking about the need to keep the peace around the world but doing nothing about it save for hosting countless academic conferences about how terrible America is. It used to be an equal partner in NORAD, but now chooses to stay out of America's new homeland-defense plans—including missile defense—partly because it reflexively views anything in America's national-security interest to be inherently inimical to its own, partly because it draws juvenile satisfaction from being a stick-in-the-mud. In a sense, Canada is the boringly self-content society described in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*, except for the fact that history continues beyond its shores.

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Naturally, America is going to defend itself with or without Canada's cooperation, but this self-Finlandization has serious consequences nonetheless. If, for example, al-Qaeda launched a September 11-style attack from Canadian soil, we would have only two choices: ask Canada to take charge, or take charge ourselves. The predictable—and necessary—U.S. action would spark outrage.

We certainly don't need the burden of turning "the world's longest undefended border" into one of the world's longest defended ones. And that's why a little invasion is precisely what Canada needs. In the past, Canada has responded to real threats from the U.S.—and elsewhere—with courage and conviction (for instance, some say more Canadians went south to enlist for war in Vietnam than Americans went north to dodge it). If the U.S. were to launch a quick raid into Canada, blow up some symbolic but unoccupied structure—Toronto's CN Tower, or perhaps an empty hockey stadium—Canada would rearm overnight.

Indeed, Canada might even be forced to rethink many of its absurd socialist policies in order to pay for the costs involved in protecting itself from the Yankee peril. Canada's neurotic anti-Americanism would be transformed into manly resolve. The U.S. could quickly pretend to be frightened that it had messed with the wrong country, and negotiate a fragile peace with the newly ornery Canadians. In a sense, the U.S. owes it to Canada to slap it out of its shame-spiral. That's what big brothers do.

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