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# Chrétien and the Commonwealth: Successes and Failures in Canada's Role as a Middle Power

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# CHRÉTIEN AND THE COMMONWEALTH: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES IN CANADA'S ROLE AS A MIDDLE POWER

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Jean Chrétien's decade-long tenure as Canadian prime minister was marked with numerous overtures for Canada to pursue a path as a "middle power" in world affairs through leadership in multilateral institutions. Specifically, this paper investigates Chrétien's position within the Commonwealth of Nations as part of this overarching strategy. This analysis finds that Chrétien's government had a number of noteworthy successes in advancing Nigerian democracy, and garnering support for other international issues in the United Nations — such as the Anti-Personal Mine Ban Convention. However, Chrétien had a number of failures including an inability and unwillingness to press for meaningful reforms in Zimbabwe, stopping the genocide in Rwanda, and stopping civil wars throughout the Commonwealth.

Le mandat de Jean Chrétien comme premier ministre du Canada a été marqué par de nombreuses opportunités pour le Canada de poursuivre une politique internationale de « puissance moyenne », grâce à son leadership dans plusieurs institutions multilatérales. Cet article examine plus précisément la position de Chrétien au sein du Commonwealth, dans le cadre de cette stratégie internationale pour le Canada. Cette analyse montre que le gouvernement Chrétien a obtenu un certain nombre de succès notables en faisant avancer la démocratie au Nigéria, et dans son soutien à d'autres questions internationales au sein des Nations Unies, telle que la Convention d'interdiction des mines anti-personnel. Cependant, Chrétien a également enregistré un certain nombre d'échecs, notamment par son incapacité, ou ses réticences, à faire pression pour obtenir des réformes démocratiques au Zimbabwe, à empêcher le génocide au Rwanda ou les guerres civiles dans certains pays du Commonwealth.

Jean Chrétien's time as prime minister from 1993 to 2003 is one that can now be viewed with a little historical distance and less political dogmatism. Politically, Chrétien was (and remains) a major proponent of multilateralism. He worked hard, along with his colleagues around the world, to build a better world as he saw fit. But, on occasion, this did not happen and the world did not progress forward. This paper investigates this dynamic between Chrétien's legacy and his use of multilateralism, especially through one important institution, the Commonwealth of Nations.

Jean Chrétien led the Liberal Party to three straight majorities in the House of Commons, in 1993, 1997, and 2000. After he left office in 2003, his successor, rival, and former finance minister, Paul Martin, then won a minority in Parliament in 2004 preserving, at least for a short period of time, the Liberal Party government. Chrétien governed at a time when the New Democratic

Party (NDP) was weak, the conservative wing of Canada was divided between Reform/Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives, and the Liberal Party core was typically strong and disciplined despite some high profile quarrels. Chrétien did compete against a very powerful Bloc Québécois (BQ) which, somewhat strangely, became the official opposition after the 1993 election. He faced challenges throughout the country, from inside and outside of his party, but managed to strongly lead Canada for a decade. In fact, Chrétien, among other prime ministers, was so powerful that *Globe and Mail* journalist, Jeffrey Simpson, described Chrétien playing a part in leading a “friendly dictatorship” (SIMPSON 2002).

During his time as prime minister, Jean Chrétien attended five Commonwealth meetings in his ten-year period as Canada’s head of government. Commonwealth meetings are held on a biannual basis; although, the meetings are not held at the exact same time on each occasion. Chrétien’s election came just after the 1993 Commonwealth meeting in Cyprus, but he attended the conferences in New Zealand in 1995, the United Kingdom in 1997, South Africa in 1999, Australia in 2002, and Nigeria in 2003 (the latter was held at the very end of his tenure as prime minister). On each occasion, Chrétien had the ability to discuss — and build rapport — with world leaders. In essence, the Commonwealth provides another multilateral forum from which to discuss major global issues, and to further diplomacy between countries. Even though the Commonwealth has limited formal powers, regular meetings amongst world leaders at international forums like the Commonwealth help to build personal rapport amongst leaders, which, under the right circumstances, can lead to further multilateral cooperation at other, more powerful forums like the United Nations (UN) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Under Chrétien, the Commonwealth received some attention, but not much. In his autobiography, Chrétien only mentioned the Commonwealth a few times. One such example, in a meeting in New Zealand, took on the very serious discussion of Nigerian human rights violations in the mid-1990s (CHRETIEN 2010: 365). He also noted the collective decision to expel Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth in his last meeting in Abuja in 2003 where Chrétien stood in opposition to the UK and Australia on the method of how to, in a gentler way, expel Zimbabwe from the organization with the door left open for re-entry if the necessary reforms were undertaken by the Mugabe government (CHRETIEN 2010: 367).

Perhaps the most important piece of evidence regarding Chretien’s Commonwealth policy was his speech entitled, “Making progress through multilateralism” given at the Commonwealth annual speech in 2004, just after he had left office as prime minister. In his speech, he notes that international

institutions “like the Commonwealth and the United Nations” have “enhanced our ability to be constructive” and “to resolve major global challenges” (CHRÉTIEN 2004). Within the Commonwealth, Chrétien notes, is the ability to more regularly dialogue with other countries, and to have “fruitful nation to nation conversations”. One of the major issues in Chrétien’s speech, however, is that he once again only mentioned the Commonwealth sparingly. He noted many successes of Canadian foreign policy—typically through the UN—but only turned to focus on the Commonwealth at the end of his speech.

The end of Chrétien’s speech does, however, highlight the successes of the Commonwealth during his time as prime minister. He notes that the Commonwealth “stood united against Apartheid”. He also notes the role played by the Commonwealth in restoring a form of democracy in Nigeria with the release of political prisoners, including future president Olesegun Obasanjo (CHRÉTIEN 2004). Finally, he argues that the Commonwealth played a role in “bringing healing and democratic rule in Zimbabwe”, a point that is very heavily contested by many scholars and organizations. Although, Zimbabwe holds regular elections, the outcomes cannot be considered free or fair, which is a baseline definition of democracy.

One important facet of the Commonwealth, Chrétien notes, is that “Leaders’ Retreat” in which the leaders of Commonwealth countries are able to meet, discuss issues, and find consensus (CHRÉTIEN 2004). In this way, Chrétien further acknowledges that the role of the Commonwealth helps to facilitate the work of the UN. In some ways, Chrétien used the Commonwealth to bolster Canada’s role on the world stage, but, in truth, there was also much more that could have been done. Although the Commonwealth does not have binding power around the world, there were plenty of issues that could have been further discussed or promoted through the Commonwealth during Chrétien’s time in office. This article assesses the legacy of Jean Chrétien with regards to his involvement (and sometimes lack thereof) in using the Commonwealth to tackle larger global issues.

### **Canada as a « Middle Power »**

Any discussion of power requires at least a brief investigation of international relations theory. In particular, the realist and liberal schools of thought are most direct in their assessment of the role of states, international institutions, and power asymmetry in the world. Canada will likely never challenge the predominant powers of the world, but, at the same time, Canada still possesses considerable economic, political, and technological strength. It has an important role to play, then, as a “middle power”. The realist school of

thought (MORGENTHAU 1948; WALTZ 1979; MEARSHEIMER 2001; SCHWELLER 1998)<sup>1</sup> examines the special roles of economic and military power in the world. Since the United States is still the world's most predominant power, Canada's position next to the United States is impacted by geography. Most notably, Canada's role as a middle power is also influenced by Hegemonic Stability Theory (GILPIN 1981), which argues that the world system is most secure (and peaceful) with the position of a major hegemonic power. But what can Canada do then if geographically located next to the hegemon? The liberal school of thought (DOYLE 1986; KEOHANE AND NYE 1977)<sup>2</sup> investigates the role of cooperation in the international arena. Most notable are international institutions — like the Commonwealth — in promoting peace and norms across the world. Canada's role as a middle power can be most forceful and helpful to world politics by utilizing multilateral institutions wherever and whenever the need arises. A middle power can also balance between hard and soft forms of power (NYE 1990; NYE 2004) to leverage Canada's position and influence to change and impact the world through agreements and treaties, rather than through the use of military power or economic sanctions (which still remain as policy options if negotiations fail).

Canada, given its geographic proximity to the United States, has long sought a foreign policy as a “middle power” (NEUFELD 1995; CHAPNICK 2005). Canada does not have the power to compete economically and militarily with the United States, but the country is a fairly large—and powerful—state, despite being overshadowed by its neighbour. Canadians themselves have contributed to this perception. Rather than settling for being a small power, Canada has taken on the mantle of adopting a strategy to impact the world in niche areas as a “middle power”. By invoking the term, “power”, successive Canadian governments have acknowledged the realist reality in the world that there are threats to world security. However, a middle power also more frequently utilizes international organisations to promote normative changes in the world in favour of human rights and democracy. Liberalism, or more narrowly, liberal internationalism, is a theoretical perspective through which Canada's impact on world affairs can be viewed.

This essay investigates this intersection: Canada's role as a middle power in the Chrétien years with respect to his use of multilateral organizations, notably the Commonwealth. Although a fuller discussion of the Chrétien years

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<sup>1</sup> These books are amongst the most well-known—and cited—on the topic of realism. They can be found with a quick search on the subject of political realism, structural realism, and neoclassical realism.

<sup>2</sup> Like the footnote on realism, these books are amongst the most noteworthy on the topic of liberalism in international relations theory.

requires an overarching examination of his foreign policy strategy throughout all years and with all institutions, a more narrow focus on the Commonwealth provides an opportunity to assess successes and failures of his opportunity to further Canada's role as a middle power in light of Hegemonic Stability Theory and the current balance of global power in the Twenty-first Century.

By the time Chrétien became prime minister he had already had a lot of experience in a range of different government positions. His foreign affairs experience, while noteworthy, was not as comprehensive as other areas though. He briefly served as the Secretary of State for External Affairs (now Minister of Foreign Affairs) under the brief tenure of former Prime Minister, John Turner in 1984. Chrétien coterminously served as Deputy Prime Minister, though, so his specific attention on foreign affairs was more limited. This was also a time in which Chrétien had just lost his challenge to become the leader of the Liberal Party to John Turner, also in 1984 (MARTIN 1995: 341). Therefore, Chrétien was very familiar with the workings of government by the time he became prime minister. He was also acutely aware of the relationship between Canada and the United States, and the ways that Canada could promote its own values on the world stage.

Canada's middle power strategy has been aided by a presence in the Commonwealth. Although not as forceful as other international institutions, Canada has impacted the world through the use of the Commonwealth.

### **Canada and the Commonwealth**

Although an in depth review of the Commonwealth is outside of the scope of this project, there are a few important dates and events that mark important changes to Canada and its role within the organisation<sup>3</sup>. The Commonwealth was initially formed in 1926 out of the dominions of the British Empire. This nascent organisation was more formally developed in 1931 with the Statute of Westminster, which, among other things, gave Canada much more formal independence from the United Kingdom (Canada became a distinct entity in 1867 with the British North America Act, but was still governed by Westminster in foreign policy). Canada joined the Commonwealth when the organisation was created alongside Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Put simply, the Commonwealth was a mechanism of

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<sup>3</sup> For a full overview of the Commonwealth see SRINIVASAN 2005; HANCOCK AND LATHAM 1977; HALL 1971

<sup>4</sup> Newfoundland was Britain's oldest dominion, but voted to merge with Canada as its tenth province in 1949 rather than staying as a British colony (SRINIVASAN 2005: 17).

maintaining the structure and entities contained within the British Empire, but also of engaging in the process of decolonisation at the same time.

Canada played a significant role in the Commonwealth and was at the forefront of major discussions such as the London (1949), Singapore (1971), and Harare Declarations (1991). These declarations helped to solidify important norms within the organisation and in the realm of international affairs. In essence, the Commonwealth played a larger role in world affairs. The Commonwealth also gave middle powers, like Canada, an opportunity to influence and shape policy throughout the world.

In recent decades, Canada has played an active role in other multilateral organisations as well such as the UN, NATO, the G7/G8,<sup>5</sup> the G20, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and La Francophonie. In some ways, these other organisations have helped to raise the profile of Canada, but, in other ways, Canada is less influential in the world. The Commonwealth is unique in the sense that Canada is able to influence West Africa, southern Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and Oceania, among other regions of the world. The growth of Canada's global role has, however, diminished the role the country plays in the Commonwealth. In Canadian foreign policy the Commonwealth has become less of a vital resource. In the words of political scientist, David Black, it has become a "wasting asset" (BLACK 2010).

Alongside a discussion of the Commonwealth, it is specifically worth highlighting that Canada is a member of La Francophonie—in essence, a French version of the Commonwealth created in 1970. Canada's large French-speaking population rooted in modern-day Quebec's connection to the French Empire speaks to Canada's dual language and heritage. Although Canada had expressly refuted the growth of La Francophonie in the 1960s (SRINIVASAN 2005: 92), the first Summit was held in 1986 (a few years prior to Chrétien's leadership of Canada). In fact, Canada hosted the second summit in 1987 in Quebec City, the eighth summit in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1999 (under Chrétien's tenure), and the twelfth summit in Quebec City in 2008.

Chrétien's role in the Commonwealth should also be noted in light of the role of La Francophonie, and the delicate nature of dealing with an increasingly restive secessionist movement in Quebec throughout the 1990s, which continues today, only with slightly less intensity. Canada's role in the Commonwealth overlapped with La Francophonie on several occasions. Most notably, Canada's membership in the Commonwealth helped the country to

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<sup>5</sup> The G6 was formed in 1975. Canada joined the group in 1976, thus creating the G7. In 1997, Russia became the eighth member of the group, thus forming the G8.

carefully critique France without overtly jeopardising the Canadian-French relationship. At the 1995 Commonwealth conference in Australia, for example, the members of the Commonwealth were able to collectively condemn the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific, which occurred right before the start of the conference (SRINIVASAN 2005: 141). Canada was able to criticize France within the multilateral organisation without the need to castigate French behaviour and hurt the bilateral relationship.

The Commonwealth is not a major global institution — at least as compared to the UN or the European Union — but it remains important for several reasons. It unites almost one-third of the countries of the world, it provides historic and institutional connections, it serves as the second largest multi-sport event in the world behind the Olympics, and unites many English-speaking peoples of the world.

For a country like Canada, membership in the UN, World Trade Organisation, and NAFTA are now considered the most important relationships. These relationships are both pivotal to Canada's political and economic role in the world. However, within the Commonwealth, Canadian leaders are regularly able to meet with other world leaders who share similar values and history. In some ways, the Commonwealth helps Canadian prime ministers in other multilateral institutions because it gives them greater exposure to these other world leaders, and more opportunities to rally support for pressing contemporary issues. Former foreign affairs minister, Lloyd Axworthy, (who served as Chrétien's second foreign affairs minister from 1996 to 2000) acknowledges that "over the years our aid efforts and our membership in the Commonwealth and La Francophonie brought us into contact with nations in those areas (the Americas and Africa)" (AXWORTHY 2004: 238). The context of the quote is that Canada was able to play a more significant role at the UN because of Canada's other multilateral priorities.

However, over time, Canada's role in the Commonwealth has diminished as other multilateral institutions have become important. The decreased role of Canada in the Commonwealth was not initiated by Jean Chrétien, but it continued to decline in popularity during his time as prime minister. In essence, he did nothing outstanding to reverse the trend. Consider, in contrast, that Canada — and Canadians more broadly — held strong and very positive views of the role of the Commonwealth for its first 50 years (BLACK 2010: 61).



### **Chrétien's Commonwealth-driven successes in Nigeria and at the UN**

During Chrétien's time within the Commonwealth, the organization advanced with the creation of a significant document, which built upon the Harare Declaration of 1991. After the 1995 meeting, the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme instituted the promotion of democracy within the Commonwealth.

Heads of Government agreed the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, designed to fulfil more effectively the democracy and development commitments contained in the Harare Declaration. They established the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare principles.

Millbrook provides a norm against a coup d'état within a member state and provides, at least on paper, the Commonwealth with an important ability to expel members who violate the democratic norms of the organisation (Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration, 1995). In effect, the Millbrook programme affords greater powers to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Another significant area of success in the Commonwealth was promoting democracy (or at least elections) in Nigeria. The Chrétien government played a major role in sanctioning Nigeria for its lack of democratic rights. After holding an election in 1993, then reneging on the results, Nigeria military dictatorship remained in power, which, to the chagrin of the international community, still involved significant human rights abuses. The Commonwealth intervened as a major international institution with the ability to pressure the bad behaviour of the Nigerian authoritarian government. Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's representative in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) joined with his fellow foreign ministers to implement the Harare Declaration (AXWORTHY 2004: 224). Over the issue of Nigeria, the members of the Commonwealth were divided as to how to proceed. Some members advocated harsh measures; whereas others wanted to push Nigeria towards reform without embarrassing the country on the world stage. On this issue, Canada broke with Britain and Australia on harshly reprimanding Nigeria and opting to implement the principles of Harare and push for careful reforms (AXWORTHY 2004; CHRETIEN 2010). Canada took a leading role on Nigeria through the Commonwealth by engaging the Nigerian government for reform, but also by sending a "strong signal" that reform was expected (AXWORTHY 2004: 225). Canada implemented a range of sanctions aimed at the Nigerian leadership in order to deter bad behaviours. Nigeria reacted by closing their high commission in Ottawa and by blaming Canada in the media for bomb

attacks in the country (which turned out to be carried out by dissident groups within the country) (AXWORTHY 2004: 225). Despite the difficult turn in the Nigerian-Canadian relationship, Nigeria was invited to London to discuss its role in the Commonwealth. Nigeria wanted to remain within the Commonwealth, but General Sani Abacha was unwilling to change. When Abacha died suddenly in 1998, his successor was eager to remove Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth and opened the country to new elections in 1999 — a time when Nigeria was more democratic (AXWORTHY 2004: 227).

Outside of specific Commonwealth changes, perhaps the most successful part of Chrétien's legacy has been the international move to eliminate the use of landmines in warfare. This is his premier legacy on the world stage, despite the fact that not all countries support this policy. Chrétien has often noted that the regular meetings with Commonwealth leaders helped to build relationships, which helped to make changes on the international stage. Canada's ongoing role facilitated the development of core peace treaties, most notably the Ottawa Treaty.

The Ottawa Treaty was first launched in 1996 as a means to decreasing—and then eliminating—the use of landmines in war. More formally, the treaty was drafted in mid-1997 and entered into force in March 1999 making Canada a major spotlight in the world. With the ratification of the treaty, Canada's role as middle power was obvious. Canada played a significant role in changing the norms and expectations of the world despite its status as a middle power, rather than a superpower.

At the time of writing (November 2013), 161 states in the world are part of the Ottawa Treaty. The vast majority of Commonwealth countries supported Canada's efforts to eradicate the usage of personal land mines. In doing so, the world could be safer for civilians especially those living in post-conflict areas. Under the Ottawa Treaty, signee states are expected to eradicate their landmine stockpiles, and then pledge not to purchase more at a later date. In effect, the norm for peace grows, and the reality of the loss of life and limbs decreases.

In using the Commonwealth, the Chrétien government specifically helped to bring change in Nigeria, and around the world with the Ottawa Treaty. Canada also played an important role in the NATO campaign in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1990s. While Russia vetoed the proposed UN Security Council Resolution, Chrétien forged ahead with a desire to prevent another genocide. Although Canada's role in both Bosnia and Kosovo was not at the forefront like the other cases, Canada used multilateralism to bring change in the world and through two missions: Stabilization Force and Kosovo Force, peace was restored in the Balkans. The Chrétien government deserves

credit here for using multilateral institutions to promote peace and to further Canada's role as a middle power.

### **Chrétien's Commonwealth failures in Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka**

Throughout Chrétien's tenure as prime minister, there were failures as well. There are limits as to what can be fully blamed on any given prime minister because there are almost 200 other countries in the world responsible for world affairs, but there were times when Canada could have — and should have — done more in the world.

Chrétien's failures are most noteworthy in the civil wars of Rwanda and Sri Lanka, as well as the inability to act for real and viable change in Zimbabwe. Since both Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe were Commonwealth members at least at some point during Chrétien's time as prime minister, he had the opportunity to act. In the case of Rwanda, Canada played a very significant role in the country, and could have mobilised other members of the Commonwealth in southern Africa to help.

The country of Rwanda joined the Commonwealth in 2009 becoming only the second state with no formal links to Britain (after Mozambique) to accede to the organisation. This country in southern Africa and its horrific history in the 1990s is a major reason why Chrétien's legacy was sullied as a result of an inability to mobilize multilateralism to prompt a dictator to reform, and to stop a genocide. Obviously, Chrétien cannot take all the blame as the United States was in a very strong geopolitical position to help. But Canada could have played a role if it helped to assemble an international coalition to at least minimize the bloodshed. Perhaps a well-organized (and well-armed) international force of a few thousand personnel could have altered the extent of the genocide dramatically.<sup>6</sup> The international community — including Canada — sat idly by and watched as 800,000 people were slaughtered over the course of 100 days in mid-1994.

Perhaps one of the major reasons for the inability — and unwillingness — to act in Rwanda was a result of military resources. Canada's military fought with distinction in numerous major wars, but, especially in recent years, has faced significant budget and troop cuts. Historian, J.L. Granatstein argues that Chrétien played a role in "killing" the Canadian military by slashing the budget

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<sup>6</sup> International Relations scholar, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago speculated that even a force of 500 well-trained American (or international) military personnel could have dissuaded much of the bloodshed in a panel discussion at the 2013 International Studies Association annual conference in San Francisco.

and stalling significant necessary equipment and technology upgrades during the 1990s and 2000s (GRANATSTEIN 2004: 163). This discussion, although not central to this work, reflects a wider debate on the role of the Canadian military and the ability to respond to crises around the world in the case of genocide.

The Rwandan genocide is particularly painful for Canada given the prominence of Canadians in the UN at the time. Canada also gave more money (per capita) to Rwanda than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa at that time — the linkages between the two countries were strongly in place (DALLAIRE 2003: 216). Moreover, since many members of the Commonwealth are located in southern Africa, it could have been an opportunity for Canada to emerge as a significant middle power with the ability to do real good in the world, like stopping the genocide. Canadian, Lieutenant General, Roméo Dallaire, was head of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) during the crisis. Despite his best efforts, Canada and other members of the international community did not respond to his calls for help as the genocide started and then led to widespread bloodshed. The Canadian government, Dallaire notes, did not have a “coherent and integrated policy toward Rwanda, only isolated department initiatives that in a time of crisis did not come together” (DALLAIRE 2003: 216).

Rwanda is a case where Chrétien’s legacy must be evaluated negatively. Adding to the sense of shame is that Canada played a prominent role in the mission to protect Rwandans. Roméo Dallaire tried to stop the slaughter of ethnic Tutsi’s (and moderate Hutu’s) by radical Hutu’s, but without any support, he was not able to singly prevent the genocide. Canada could have taken a leading role, or mobilized support through the Commonwealth to stop the genocide. Of course, hindsight is twenty-twenty and it was not expected that Rwanda would descend into extreme violence so quickly. Nonetheless, Rwanda ranks as a failure for many world leaders, including Prime Minister Chrétien. He, and other world leaders, have often expressed regret at their inaction to stop the genocide.

Zimbabwe, in many respects and by many statistical measures, is one of the worst countries in the world. The great shame is that Zimbabwe had much potential prior to Robert Mugabe’s time as president. Moreover, many countries in southern Africa are beginning to thrive economically with young, vibrant, and transparent leadership combined with robust institutions that have created fair societies within which business can flourish (RADELET 2010).

Over time Zimbabwe continued to score worse on economic, transparency, and political freedom indicators. One role for the Commonwealth under Section 8 of the Harare Declaration was to work on “democracy,

democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government” (Harare Commonwealth Declaration 1991). Numerous other parts of Section 8 described economic development, education, health care, and general improvements in the society — none of which could be ascribed to Zimbabwe under Mugabe.

Zimbabwe was finally suspended from the Commonwealth in March 2002 — and opted to leave the organisation voluntarily at the end of 2003. Canada’s historic role in the Commonwealth — to push countries to reform whilst remaining in the organisation — proved too soft in the case of Zimbabwe. Although, as noted earlier, this strategy proved successful with Nigeria after a diplomatic rift between the countries, Nigeria made some initial improvements. Zimbabwe has continued to get worse, though, and something could have been done in this regard. Canada has a model of acting with both elements of realism and liberalism in its sanctions of Nigeria, which could have been replicated with Zimbabwe.

The Commonwealth could still play a role here in continuing to sanction the Mugabe regime. If all Commonwealth members resolved to limit trade with states like Zimbabwe — similar to the way that the United States has sanctioned Iran over its nuclear program and pressured its trading partners — the situation may have changed by now.

Overall, the Zimbabwe situation reflects Chrétien’s larger foreign policy, which was much more cautious than Mulroney’s. Canada had a more reduced international presence in the form of peacekeepers and desire for intervention to stop conflict (NOSSAL 1998/1999: 93-94). Part of this was due to electoral politics where Mulroney was seen to have overstepped his bounds; Chrétien, in contrast, did not do enough. Not acting in the international arena is not necessarily a bad thing, but Chrétien could have made better use of international institutions like the Commonwealth to better seek diplomatic solutions to international crises and issues. By further sanctioning Zimbabwe, the Commonwealth could have sent a much clearer message on the erosion of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in the country. Furthermore, the Commonwealth could have encouraged members to limit trade, or impose sanctions on the regime, at least until improvements have been made in Zimbabwe. The latter option is quite harsh, but Zimbabwe continues to undergo numerous human rights and economic problems, which will only continue to lessen the opportunities of young people in the country. The Commonwealth has, in essence, done a disservice to Zimbabweans by vacillating too long on this issue.

Finally, the case of Sri Lanka is worth noting. Starting in 1983 and ending in 2009, Sri Lanka went through a long and bloody civil war. Although Chrétien can only shoulder minimal blame for the conflict, Canada could have initiated more pressure through the Commonwealth to uphold human rights. Given Canada's large Tamil population, members of the Liberal government often did speak to the issue of supporting the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, but this rarely made it to the top levels of government. Chrétien was right to distance himself from the Tamil Tigers within the Sri Lankan civil war, but more pressure for a peaceful resolution of the conflict could have been useful, even though Chrétien did give a speech on Canadian federalism as a model for post-conflict resolution in Sri Lanka.

### **Chrétien's legacy and the Commonwealth**

Historically, the Commonwealth has provided Canadians with a significant diplomatic opportunity to engage parts of the world more deeply than in other international organizations. While Canada typically seeks to utilize multilateral institutions, the country has relatively little power — or voting rights — when compared to the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, for example.

Chrétien's foreign policy legacy remains noteworthy for some successes — especially through the Commonwealth — with regards to Nigeria. Although Nigeria continues to struggle with governance and identity-based politics, there is a modicum of democratic response to the people. Under Olesugun Obasanjo, Nigeria's President from 1999 to 2007, it was a better system. Chrétien also used the opportunity of the Commonwealth to help build consensus at other international institutions for issues like the eradication of landmines.

There are also a number of notable failures of Chrétien's foreign policy with regards to the Commonwealth. The Rwandan genocide, the Sri Lankan conflict (which only ended in 2009), and the failure to help reform Zimbabwe are amongst the most notable problems of the era. Again, Chrétien cannot shoulder this criticism alone, but he could have been more assertive in his priorities with regards to applying pressure and ending these conflicts.

Overall, Chrétien missed an opportunity to revive the Commonwealth, but did so in choosing to engage other organizations. This is not necessarily a poor strategy for a middle power, but it undercuts Canada's role in the world where the country could be a major leader in an organisation like the Commonwealth. In terms of international relations theory, Canada's role as a middle power is a response to the need and desire to impact the world, whilst cognizant of the neighbouring hegemonic power, the United States. Canada's

ability to establish peaceful norms can be completed with a mix of realist and liberal positions. Realism is necessary when situations of conflict arise such as Rwanda, Sri Lanka, or in a different way, Zimbabwe. Overt use of military forces, or military support, can play a role, as do other realist options like economic sanctions, and overt diplomatic pressures. Liberalism, specifically liberal institutionalism, can also play an important role. International institutions like the Commonwealth provide a forum from which to cajole, nudge, and alter the poor behaviour of some states. This provides Canada an opportunity to assert itself as a middle power in the world and to make a real — and lasting — impact.

Future Canadian prime ministers could do well by revitalising Canada's role in the Commonwealth. The organisation could be used in two ways. First, the Commonwealth could do more to promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights among member states by sanctioning member states that continually violate these norms with impunity. By upholding these norms, Canada could help push the world towards greater responsiveness to the needs of people. Second, the Commonwealth could be used as a “staging ground” for major international reforms like the Ottawa Treaty. By using the Commonwealth members as support, major international treaties could be introduced, debated, and then approved through the organisation. At that point, the treaty could be taken to the UN with the full support of all Commonwealth members. In essence, this would be a new tactic, and could provide middle powers like Canada an ability to make greater changes on the world stage.

Middle powers like Canada will have little opportunity to utilize hard power politics, which, at times, is necessary to stop genocide. By utilizing support from Commonwealth members, an international coalition could have been constructed to stop the atrocities in Rwanda. Or, alternatively, another organisation like NATO or the African Union could have been used to intervene, simply with funding commitments from Commonwealth states. At the very least, it would have served to improve Canada's role on the world stage and revitalise the Commonwealth.

Overall, Chrétien maintains an enduring legacy in Canada. Given the nature of polarised politics, part of this legacy depends on support for Liberal candidates. Chrétien did a lot of things well as Prime Minister. However, his use of the Commonwealth as an opportunity for furthering international issues was used, but perhaps underutilized. There are a lot of issues for any given Prime Minister to deal with, but there were times when the Commonwealth could have — and should have been — a higher priority.

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