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Forgotten Partnership: U.S.-Canada Relations Today by Charles F. Doran - Book Review

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Review by: Donald Alper

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Book Reviews

Cecil L. Eubanks, Editor

Forgotten Partnership: U.S.-Canada Relations Today. By Charles F. Doran. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. Pp. 294.)

The study of Canada-U.S. relations is rarely set in a global context. This book begins by arguing that the relationship is distorted if it is examined only in bilateral terms and not viewed with a larger international relations perspective. According to the author, "Without this focus, problems and initiatives appear distorted; policy options seem too confined or too limitless; relations between the countries seem parochial and misleadingly simple" (p. 4). The international relations perspective adds a valuable dimension to this study and sets it apart from most of the literature in the field.

The guiding theoretical framework is laid out in chapter two. The Canada-U.S. relationship is viewed as having three dimensions—psychological-cultural, trade-commercial and political-strategic. The psychological-cultural dimension is said to be the most important in accounting for misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are common because Americans fail to understand Canadian sensitivity about being taken for granted, and Canadians are viewed by Americans as overly paranoid about the powerful American presence. The psychological-cultural aspects of the relationship are accentuated because the two nations are so close physically and intertwined socially and economically. Americans cannot understand why Canadians "don't like us," and Canadians have difficulty finding "space" in which American influence is not felt.

The trade-commercial dimension accounts for most interaction between the two countries, but the weight given it by Canada is greater than that by the U.S. This is largely due to the fact that approximately three-fourths of all Canadian trade is conducted with the United States. According to Doran there is another reason: Canada historically has prompted Canadian governments to become heavily involved in commercial initiatives and "to use the international system to transform the character of the Canadian economy" (p. 40). In contrast, the American government, more committed to *laissez faire*, has viewed statecraft less as a means to attain economic goals and more to achieve security and strategic objectives.

The third dimension of the relationship is the political-strategic. While political-strategic concerns are vital to all facets of American foreign policy because of its global orientation, Canada as a middle power tends to de-emphasize political-strategic matters. Instead, Canada has historically adopted what Doran calls a “functionalist ideal” (p. 38) which had turned Canada into a kind of honest broker secure in its lack of global responsibilities. Although Canada retains a strong association with the Western security alliance (NATO, NORAD), her concern about political autonomy reduces the importance of security consideration vis-a-vis the U.S.

Interdependence has become something of a code word to describe the essential structure of the Canada-U.S. relationship. In an important part of the book Doran challenges the concept of interdependence for its lack of interpretive power. He argues that while interdependence is an apt description of the overall structure of Canada-U.S. relations, the concept or paradigm really helps us understand very little. A revised model is offered which spells out the essential structural characteristics of the relationship—intervulnerability, asymmetry, offsetting bargaining strengths, ambiguity of foreign policy interests, and a tradition of prudence in foreign policy conduct. Each of these is discussed at length in chapter two.

Chapters three, four, and five examine in detail the three dimensions of the relationship mentioned above. In chapter three, “The Psychological-Cultural Dimension,” an effort is made to relate Canadian political culture to foreign policy outlook. Although much of this chapter is extraneous to the central argument, the message seems to be that Canadian historical experience has instilled certain values in political elites which are reflected in the Canadian approach to foreign policy and its relations with the U.S. American values are different (especially with regard to equality and tolerance of contending ideologies), which sets the stage for misunderstanding over definition and pursuit of national interests. The most interesting part of the chapter is the discussion of “status disequilibrium,” which refers to Canada’s contradictory status as both a major power (if one looks at territorial size, per-capita income, resource base) and a minor power (if one looks at military spending, GNP, population). This disequilibrium, according to Doran, “nurtures anxieties and uncertainties regarding the perception of its true position relative to others in the international system” (p. 95). Conflicting pressures associated with status disequilibrium make it difficult for Canadian policymakers to construct a foreign policy consistent with both domestic and foreign (especially U.S.) perceptions of Canada’s position in the international system.

Chapters six and seven are lengthy case accounts of law of the sea, environment, fisheries, and energy issues. These issues are singled out for detailed treatment because they have been very contentious and represent

policy areas which are of much greater importance to Canada than the United States.

Chapter eight, "A Concluding Vision: Prerequisite for Partnership," is a call for both countries to assess carefully the condition of Canada-U.S. relations in the 1980s, especially as it bears on the traditional notion of partnership. Since the early 1970s, the two countries have been moving along divergent paths. While the United States has tended to view Canada with an integrationist mentality (illustrated by Reagan's North American Accord idea in 1980), Canada has become preoccupied with autonomy, or what Doran calls autarky. Each reinforces the other; the more the U.S. shows interest in integration of some sort, the less Canada wants to get involved (p. 256). For Doran, the way out of this dilemma is to rethink the idea of partnership. Partnership is defined in terms of three characteristics: a sense of purpose; awareness by each country of how both are subject to intervulnerability; and recognition of a proper sense of limits in what each can expect of the other and of the overall relationship (p. 260). Doran is careful not to confuse his notion of partnership with an older view of Canada-U.S. relations that emphasizes specialness, consensus, and even sentimentalism. His prescription calls for careful attention to diplomatic setting — or tone — of relationship rather than how close or distant the structures of the two governments and economies are at any given time. In the end, a viable, mature, and responsible partnership depends on the extent to which members of the decision-making elites in both Washington and Ottawa bring respect and informed thought to their deliberations. A healthy and mutually beneficial relationship can endure despite differences in policy priorities if a positive tone is maintained.

This is a very valuable book on Canada-U.S. relations because it approaches the subject matter from a theoretical perspective and does not ignore substantive policy issues that define relations between the two countries. One might question whether American views toward Canada are as colored by the integrationist ideal as the author suggests, or, for that matter, whether Canadians are as concerned about autonomy as they once were. The Mulroney Government's free-trade initiative and the protectionist mood in Washington suggest a reversal of mentalities, at least in the present economic and political climates.

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