

The Fact that Matters: Power Asymmetry in the Canadian-American Relationship and How Canada Handles It

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This paper begins by underscoring Canada's vulnerability to United States influence and power: slightly superior to the United States in land mass, Canada is very much its inferior in terms of economic strength and population size; has been open (this is true even of French-speaking Quebec) to the penetration of its culture and ideas; and has not been able to resist its requirements in the area of defence and security policy. The paper then turns to the fact that, all this notwithstanding, Canada has maintained a significant degree of national space: elements of a European-style social democracy exist, a state-assisted cultural life holds place, and a made-in-Canada foreign policy functions, dramatically so in relation to Cuba and Iraq. A look at what explains this state of affairs makes up the paper's bulk. Consideration is given to the measure in which a series of national policies have allowed United States strength to be used against itself; Canadian diplomatic and negotiating techniques are examined; and special strategies (counterweights, Canada's brand of "Finlandization") come under scrutiny. The paper concludes that Canada's qualified but real autonomy is owing to three things: a policy-strengthened sense of national self and national self-interest; an understanding of the location of the line between behaviour the United States will accept and behaviour it will not; and a state framework functioning as both a symbol of separateness and an agent of its maintenance. Asymmetrical interdependence is real; the hegemony it generates is measured; that outcome has not been accidental.