

Canada's Future: China or the U.S.?

Canadians don't like the United States today. A British Broadcasting Corporation opinion poll in 34 nations published at the beginning of April found that, while the view of the United States was improving in most countries, in Lebanon, Egypt, and Canada it was worsening. Only 27 percent of Canadians had a positive view of the U.S., while 62 percent held dark thoughts, up six percent from last year. Moreover, according to an Environics poll done for a group called "Canada's World" and published at the beginning of 2008, more than half of Canadians described the United States as a "negative force" in the world. In second place? Iran, with only 21 percent calling the oil-rich theocracy a negative force. These are stunning figures.

Their force is compounded by a *Globe and Mail* self-selected opinion poll that ran online on March 29 and 30. Fifteen thousand readers registered an opinion and 54 percent said that the United States' "current decline" will continue. In other words, more than half of *Globe and Mail* readers, supposedly an elite group, believe that the United States is likely to slip into irreversible strategic or economic decline tomorrow. There are few signs of unhappiness about this anywhere. Indeed, such is the force of anti-Americanism in Canada that there sometimes seems to be a barely restrained glee at the prospect.

This *schadenfreude* is simply foolish. The U.S. is Canada's greatest market, the sole democratic superpower, and the defender of last resort for every democracy in the world, not least Canada. If it falls, if it is replaced by new superpowers such as China or India, there will be consequences.

Those Canadians who hope to see the new Asian giants rival the U.S. in a few decades as the great global engine and the new big market for Canada simply do not realize that such a change would be an unmitigated disaster for us. China is a brutal one-party dictatorship, a mixture of totalitarianism and unbridled capitalism that is as tough on its restive provinces as it is on its foreign suppliers and markets. India is a strife-ridden giant that might follow a path to peaceful economic expansion, but it is a relatively new democracy. However both of these rising powers develop in the next few decades, one thing seems certain: neither has interest in Canada as anything other than a source of raw materials, oil, and food, and as a market for their goods produced by cheap labour. Canadians historically have always feared being hewers of wood: China and India want only timber from us.

Canada has many disputes with the United States on trade, but we both play by the same rules (most of the time!), and our present disputes are as nothing to the probable situation if China, say, had 78 percent, the present U.S. percentage, of our trade. Could any sensible Canadian want that? Will a future China be benign or aggressive? No one can answer this question with real confidence today, but in either case, no one should believe that Chinese domination of our export and import economy could serve Canadian National Interests. We should pray that this will not happen and that the American decline foreseen by so many Canadians does not materialize.

If it does, we are in trouble. The rise of China and India, and of Brazil, Russia and the European Union will not pull Canada out of the American orbit. Far more likely is that it will force Canada to draw closer to the United States—in our own National Interests. Strategic forecasters do not see India, Brazil, or the EU as likely security threats to North America in the next twenty years, but most do have concerns about China and Russia, both of which are already great land powers and both of which are developing their navies rapidly. So should we all.

Of course, Canada should seek to expand its trade with all these rising powers, but we must recognize that American security interests, North American security interests, will impact us in a world that may soon have more than one superpower and many more unstable nations and organized terrorist groupings. There are now and will be more potential threats out there.

In decline or not, the United States will remain a military superpower well into this century. Future Canadian and American governments will be even more concerned about air, space, and sea threats, and the U.S. in particular will need to ensure that the area to its north is secure. That means for Canada, just as for the U.S. security trumps trade, geography trumps everything else. No matter what Canadians think today about the United States, Canada is not about to become an island. For good or ill, the Canadian future is American.

J.L. Granatstein is a Senior Research Fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute.