

## Who is my Neighbour? Trudeau and Foreign Policy

Jeremy Kinsman  
Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom (to August 2002). Now Canadian Ambassador to the European Union.

Who is my neighbour? Is she the woman rummaging for food in the back streets of an Asian shanty town? Is he the man in South America in prison for leading a trade union? The people dying in Africa for lack of medical care, or clean water, are they my neighbours? What about those who are dying in the spirit in the villages of India for lack of a job, or an education, or hope? Are my neighbours the children running from the sound of gunfire in the streets of Beirut? If we, the peoples of the North, say yes, then we will act; we will act together to keep hope alive. If we say no, then they are doomed and so are we.

Pierre Trudeau, 15 June 1981<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction

Pierre Elliott Trudeau's impact on Canada was enormous. His dual commitment to individual civil liberties and to building the Canadian nation resulted in a charter of rights enshrined inside a patriated constitution and a changed country. In foreign policy, where he dealt with a wider and changing world, not so amenable to shaping by any one middle power, his impact was less convincing. Moreover, a political leadership career spanning 16 years inevitably takes one down a long and winding road. Inconsistency-seekers can feast on a record that long—no matter what the vision.

Trudeau's foreign policy was assembled from within a conceptual framework analogous to his view of Canada and Canadians that emphasized nation-building within a general vision on the great fault-lines of global relations: North-South and East-West. For all the twists in his foreign policies, Trudeau was remarkably consistent in his commitment to individual civil rights, and to the rights of individual states, to be free from arbitrary interference in their affairs, which necessarily involved something of a contradiction. At the time, the doctrine of humanitarian intervention had not yet been developed. Though Trudeau the anti-racist abhorred apartheid, and the assumptions governing the

conduct of racist Rhodesia, Trudeau the international jurist was less confrontational on the issue of individual political freedoms within the socialist states of Eastern Europe. Whatever he thought of individual regimes, he endeavoured to work with them. For example, he promoted détente with the Soviet Union in the full knowledge that if he had been made to live there it would have been as a recidivist dissident in prison. Still, he was a real friend of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, or of Cuba's Fidel Castro for that matter, when they were repressing their own societies. Explanation? They were nation-builders, which he admired; he was one himself.

Trudeau was an interventionist in favour of a better deal for poorer countries and peoples, and he was a great promoter of détente. As will be seen, his efforts in both areas frequently caused problems with the United States. The question of third world poverty is not new, of course. The Pearson Commission in the 1960s and the Brandt Commission in the 1970s were among many attempts to mobilize public opinion and political will to confront and bridge the great North/South divide<sup>2</sup>. The record since is at best uneven; many of the more open Third World countries have grown at impressive rates, but the already pathetically inadequate per capita incomes of Africans of twenty years ago are today twenty per cent less.

Although some contemporary political leaders such as Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, supported by Blair and France's President Jacques Chirac, remain determined to place Africa close to the top of the G7/8 and other international agendas, public interest in world poverty has waned over the years. The end of the cold war diminished American interest in the Third World. It also changed the stakes: a failed state or society today does not awaken direct interest in the way a state lost to communism or Soviet influence would have done thirty years ago. This would have disheartened Pierre Trudeau who believed that East-West competition diverted energy and resources from North-South issues. But because he did not significantly raise Canadian official development assistance despite a commitment to do so, some suggest he was more a 'talker' than a 'walker' on North-South issues.

During the cold war, Trudeau was known as a great champion of détente. He focused specifically on nuclear dangers. He was bitterly disappointed in 1972 when India exploded a nuclear weapon using materials produced by a Canadian-made reactor. He gave a lot of thought to nuclear proliferation, placing his weight behind a strategy of 'suffocation' of the spread of component technology and materials in 1975. But his over-riding worry was that the dangers of East-West competition would lead to nuclear confrontation.

---

## **2 1968–1980: Trudeau and the World**

### **2.1 The Election of June 1968: The Man We Got**

Pierre Trudeau, it must always be remembered, was a working and successful politician, for all his ideals. He knew that he was not elected to change the world. He was also supremely rational and believed that every idea or policy, entrenched or far-fetched, should be examined. The aura of personal mystery should never have obscured what Canadians were getting with Trudeau. As minister of justice in the government of Lester B. Pearson, he reformed the Criminal Code, thereby ousting 'the state from the bedrooms of the nation'. For most Canadians, he turned the country into a very contemporary society.

### **2.2 The Lucidity of the Law**

Trudeau's sang-froid in confronting separatism impressed Canadians. When the FLQ (Front de Libération du Québec) hit us in the autumn of 1970, Trudeau's response was 'Just watch me.' But his language was usually not that of street confrontation. It was the lucid reasoning of a jurist from the Faculté de Droit. Many of us from Quebec who thought we believed in 'special status' for that province, largely because we found English Canada uncomprehending of Quebec society, were jarred by the rigidity of Trudeau's reasoning on the indivisibility of basic national rights and federal powers. But we were willing to believe that he could do it when he said he would strengthen Quebec's place and sense of belonging inside a stronger Canada.

### **2.3 Trudeau the Person**

Trudeau was a mixture of the shy and deferential and of the confrontational. (I remember sessions with him in 1981 on the crafting of foreign policy speeches. Often he would assign a short speech to two writers. That year I was chosen along with a brilliant senior lawyer and eclectic reader, Len Legault. We each did our version, and then the master received us together. Once, we were summoned to discuss a welcome speech for Ronald Reagan's first Canadian trip. The first meeting of these two totally opposite characters had to be right. Trudeau's biggest problem seemed to be how to break the bad news to the losing writer. He spoke lovingly of Len's text, in which the prime minister expressed Canadian federalist empathy for California, that 'loose confederation of shopping malls,' a line from Joan Didion that I admired jealously. Then he turned to me and purred: 'But Jeremy I just love your beginning. It's so ... existential.' In bestowing his intellectual benediction, he generously compensated for the

fact, obvious to all three of us, that in front of 5,000 people the next day, his words would be Len's.)

But when he confronted an idea or a value he abhorred, he was ruthless. Small-mindedness or the inability to see the bigger picture could induce a cold fury. Old positions, especially hallowed ones, were subjected to the severest scrutiny.

## **2.4 Taking Over: 1968–72**

During those opening years, Trudeau brought not just new style to public life; he also introduced a new intellectual framework. Management by objectives was the motif of governance. He created the Cabinet Committee on Priorities and Planning, which became the inner Cabinet of key ministers, chaired by the prime minister and staffed by the brightest and best, Michael Pitfield, Robert Rabinovitch, the late Hal Kroeker, and company.

He saw no reason to exempt Canadian foreign policy from his tough tests of reason. Believing the Department of External Affairs was over-influenced by static, often Eurocentric, cold war thinking, he challenged officials to mark in a foreign policy review those places in which Canada's interests stood out. 'Where's Biafra?' he asked sardonically in 1968. But it was not said in the narrow spirit of rich-country indifference. To Trudeau, Canada's interests stood behind doing what was reasonable and was rooted in Canadian values. It was not an either/or choice for him. We do both.

## **2.5 The North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

In 1968, NATO was a closed-doctrine shop. But maintaining a Canadian military almost uniquely for the purpose of fighting a land war in Western Europe made no sense to the new prime minister. Over 10,000 Canadian soldiers and 108 Canadian combat aircraft with dual reconnaissance/nuclear strike roles were stationed in an already prosperous Germany, along with heavy tanks and armour of no use to Canada in any other theatre. He didn't buy the official advice that Canada's alliance obligations or the state of the cold war removed any choice in the matter. His unilateral reductions in 1968–9 to Canadian forces in Europe created a stir in Washington and fed the notion that he was a 'lefty' who was soft on the challenges of the cold war. It was an impression that would dog him for the next twenty years.

Trudeau was never soft, but he did have enduring concerns about the need to reduce tension in the East-West standoff, especially over nuclear détente. He firmly believed in the need to move back from the danger of direct conflict—he knew NATO helped by being a clear deterrent but worried it locked Canada into a culture of anti-communist conservatism.

The Americans and others frequently found Trudeau infuriating because he questioned received wisdom. His decisions on nation-building and on internationalism were assertive, and inevitably his actions were felt in the immediate neighbourhood. This raises a much discussed point: Was Trudeau anti-American? I think it is fair to say that he was not all that preoccupied by the United States. To Trudeau, the United States was a normal feature of the Canadian landscape. He did not believe Canada-United States relations required a comprehensive strategic roadmap vaulting the relationship over and above all other considerations.

He was also much less worried than many of his English-Canadian colleagues about the cultural influence of the United States, and in that and maybe that alone he joined the views of such separatists as Jacques Parizeau and René Lévesque. Unlike Lévesque, Trudeau had no feel for American society, politics, or popular culture, even though he had studied at Harvard. The United States was the big and, to him, discernibly different country next door; an elephant, but not a threat to his identity.

His relationships with United States presidents varied. Richard Nixon disliked liberals and intellectuals and just didn't understand Trudeau. But in Jimmy Carter, the prime minister found a good American friend, one who supported Canadian national unity, back on the front pages after the Parti Québécois (PQ) was elected in Quebec about the same time in 1976 as Carter won the presidency in the United States. He also shared with Trudeau an instinctive worldview on growing North-South antagonism. But that was after Trudeau had challenged standard United States practice over China.

## **2.6 China**

For Trudeau, the fiction that the aging anti-communists in Taiwan spoke for the billion 'mainland' Chinese was, in today's terms, a 'no-brainer.' The Korean War had put a stop to the process of transferring diplomatic recognition to the communist victors in Beijing. Some, like Britain, who had made the transfer before 1950 had diplomatic ties with the Chinese. Most Western countries did not.

Canada's negotiations with the Chinese took place in secret in Stockholm during 1969. Meetings between the two countries were held in very small groups, as secretly as possible. Over tea, positions on the status of Taiwan would be exchanged, taken back to the two capitals, and then another meeting would take place in a month or so to try to inch forward toward agreement. The stakes were high. Trudeau's declared intention to negotiate the acknowledgement of Beijing's de facto authority in China after an almost twenty-year freeze would necessarily set the stage and the terms for a flood of successive recognitions.

I was sent in the summer of 1969 from Brussels as an extra body for our tiny resident diplomatic mission in Stockholm, specifically to help determine who was trying to subvert our negotiations, from circulating false Canadian reporting telegrams that denigrated the Chinese, to professionally beating up a Canadian diplomatic-passport holder (a staff interior decorator who had come to fix up a new official residence) who had just landed from Ottawa. Was it the Taiwanese, the Russians, the Japanese, or even Americans? The answer remains a mystery.

Nonetheless, the deal was done by the spring of 1970 and earned Canada much favour from the Chinese. For years after, at United Nations conferences where Canada and China were apt to be alphabetical neighbours, there would be much hugging and bowing between us: 'Ahhh, Canada ... TRUDEAU ... very good, very good.' No doubt Nixon and his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, would have connected to the Chinese by 1972, but it might have been more difficult for both sides without Canada's clearing work. The point about Trudeau's initiative was that he knew that he was right in going ahead with it, without American approval, because he knew the Americans would be doing the same before very long. Indeed, that sums up Trudeau's approach: if there was a clear Canadian interest involved, he was not going to seek United States permission before proceeding. On China, it was clearly in Canada's interest to do the reasonable thing: acknowledge who was governing the billion Chinese. At the same time, Canada's interest in a privileged relationship with the Chinese would be furthered.

Conversely, if there was no specific Canadian interest involved in an American course of action, Trudeau tended to shut up about it. I regretted his relative silence over the war in Vietnam because I thought United States policy was wrong (though Trudeau carried on the policy initiated under Pearson and his secretary of state for external affairs, Paul Martin, of not asking incoming Americans about their draft status). But because we had no stake in it, Trudeau

basically kept his views private. He got no credit from Nixon because Nixon agreed that it was none of our business.

## **2.7 Sovereignty in the Arctic**

During Trudeau's first term in office, another issue at the core of Canadian 'business' that the United States saw as a threat was a product of Trudeau's legal reasoning and his bent for 'nation-building.' That was the Canadian response to the planned voyage through the northwest passage in September 1969 of the United States super-tanker, *Manhattan*, which sought a way to bring newly discovered Alaskan energy to east coast markets. Ivan Head, Trudeau's personal foreign policy adviser and intellectual companion during his first several years in office, has written comprehensively about this defining episode in Canadian foreign policy in which Canada asserted jurisdiction over its Arctic waters because its responsibility for protecting the fragile Arctic environment insisted upon it<sup>3</sup>. In strategic terms, of course, the cold war rivalry between the USSR and the United States took concrete form most dramatically under the sea, especially under the polar icecap. Few prerogatives have been held as tenaciously by United States government lawyers as those favouring the maximum freedom of the sea for the United States navy. The possibility that Canada would draw straight baselines to enclose the northwest passage in Canadian internal waters and assert economic sovereignty over the waters by establishing an economic protection zone extending 100 miles offshore posed a dangerous challenge to the United States.

Trudeau made the north part of Canada's idea of itself. His initiative to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic for the purposes of environmental protection was a precursor to the drafting of a new law of the sea convention that would eventually codify the existence of coastal state responsibility for a 200-mile economic zone. The 1970 Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act anticipated a whole body of vital international law and of practice regarding the regulation of the transport by sea of bulk cargoes. If the Trudeau administration did nothing else that was new in foreign policy, this concrete and very real contribution to international law and to Canadian sovereignty would stand as a fine monument.

## **2.8 Economic Nationalism: The Third Option**

Not all of the challenges arose on the Canadian side. Some came from south of the border. In the summer of 1971, the Nixon administration, beleaguered by expenditures on the Vietnam War and chronic trade deficits with Japan,

unilaterally imposed an import tax surcharge across the board. There was no consultation or even advance warning, even for its principal trading partner—which few in Washington seemed to realize was Canada. The impact of a surcharge on an already slowing Canadian economy could be disastrous. The psychological impact on the self-esteem of a generation of public servants and politicians used to working hand-in-hand with sympathetic American colleagues was equally severe.

Official protests went on throughout the summer. In the meantime, a strategy, which had its genesis in the Department of External Affairs, was drawn up and eventually approved in the Cabinet Committee on Priorities and Planning, namely, the much discussed ‘third option.’ The three options were basically: (a) to seek greater integration with the United States; (b) to keep things as they were, which would mean running hard just to stay in place; or (c) to ‘pursue a comprehensive long-term strategy to develop and strengthen the Canadian economy and other aspects of its national life and in the process to reduce the present Canadian vulnerability’<sup>4</sup>.

The third option has often been called a failure by those who saw it as way to diversify trade away from the United States and toward the European Community. Britain’s recent entry into the EC was Canada’s leverage to expanded access. Indeed, the Department produced another paper just after the third option paper with just such a European thrust, which was pursued avidly in 1972–3. The impact on Canada’s trade numbers was nil, though a ‘contractual link’ with the EC was created, a consultative device that, in modified version, endures to this day.

Clearly, this was not the third option. The third option was essentially a *domestic* policy option, very much in line with Trudeau’s determination to strengthen national institutions in Canada. Its aspirations were those of the emerging ‘Gray Report’ (“Foreign Direct Investment in Canada”, Information Canada, Ottawa, 1972) which outlined how massive foreign ownership had reduced Canadian leverage over domestic economic development, eroding research and scientific capabilities. Canada was also described as over-reliant on the export of commodities and on the United States as a market. The report concluded that Canada had become highly vulnerable to United States protectionism, precisely the situation in 1971. The prescription was to build back Canadian capability.

As a domestic policy option, the third option went some way toward strengthening the economy. In hindsight, the creation of the Canada Development

Corporation and a foreign investment review agency meant to scrutinize ‘net benefit’ to Canada of incoming capital, and a host of other agencies and ideas then or later, such as Petrocan, may seem statist and contrary to market forces. But that market forces alone were marginalizing Canadian economic life was a widely held view at the time. A case can be made that strengthening Canadian capabilities in research and development and upgrading resources were essential pre-conditions for the flat-out competition introduced by the free trade agreement with the United States 17 years later.

Trudeau was not especially an economic nationalist; he agreed with the creation of new state-owned institutions because he believed at the time that they were essential for nation-building, not that they were necessarily the best economics. A decade later he signed on to an interventionist, centrist, and divisive National Energy Policy because at the height of the energy crisis the price projections for oil (which turned out to be wrong) made a strong case that the nation-building enterprise demanded it. Indeed, Trudeau was basically a *laissez-faire* economic manager in practice, if sometimes a theoretical interventionist in discussion. (I remember in particular that one of his casual intellectual musings in Cabinet in 1971 about his readings in the 1950s on surplus capital theory propounded by an economist of the era, Paul Sweezy, prompted my bosses to send me into a frenzy of desperate research in the library to find out who and what the prime minister had been talking about!).

### **3 1980: The Return to Power**

Trudeau did not seriously turn his attention to trying, at least in part, to change the world until he found himself unexpectedly back in power in 1980, and the Quebec referendum that spring was decisively defeated. He meant to do what he could to encourage the ‘embrace of a global ethic.’ During the 1970s, the developing countries had pressed for a New International Economic Order. Intended to present the poor and developing countries with a fairer slate of opportunities, it was fairly dirigiste and market-hostile. There was a certain amount of make-believe in the idea that a global negotiating forum could somehow address, textually and substantively, the very different needs of developing countries as disparate as Brazil and Botswana and Bahrein. Or that internal governance was not also part of the problem. But there was no make-believe in the conditions of wretchedness that billions of human beings had to confront every day of their lives. ‘We must aim for nothing less than an acceptable distribution of the world’s wealth,’ Trudeau had said in 1975 in a speech at Mansion House, London. That was obviously easier said than done; but a

consensus emerged that progress might be made internationally to promote the dual objectives of increased foreign aid flows and structural reform.

In the anarchic United Nations General Assembly, where they held sway, developing countries wanted to pressure the somewhat imperious international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which the rich countries controlled through weighted voting shares, to adjust practices to suit developing country needs. At the United Nations, countries negotiated in basic blocs—all developing countries as one unit, as *demandeurs*, against the developed countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with Canada and the Nordic countries playing a more creative role than the states of the EC, with its cumbersome internal process, could do. Japan and the United States merely went through the motions of what they considered an unreal exercise intent on interfering with the reliable financial agencies they controlled. The communist states of Eastern Europe were already nobody's model and were generally left out of the calculations. China watched.

Despite the stalemate in discussions, Trudeau thought by 1980 that some important breakthroughs were possible. His opportunity would be the G7 summit, which he would host the following summer. He was about to become the dean of G7 summits, and lamented that they had become short-term exercises in political positioning on the part of participants, with little regard for the rest of the world—a criticism frequently heard today. He hoped to use the 1981 summit to help shift the centre of gravity of international concerns by addressing the issue of power-sharing directly with the principal holders of the power in question. It is a theme that was much in evidence at the G7/8 summit hosted by Chrétien in Kananaskis in June 2002.

To prepare for the summit, Trudeau had appointed the under-secretary of state for external affairs, Alan Gotlieb. This most brilliant of public servants instructed me to write a short, conceptual paper on the subject of power-sharing, which Trudeau could distribute to the summit participants. We believed the paper would be well received by Jimmy Carter in the White House. But the paper never left Ottawa; a few weeks later Ronald Reagan replaced Carter, and the agenda changed. Trudeau's views, of course, didn't. As he later outlined in an address to the House of Commons in 1981 (one of the rare times a Prime Minister of Canada addressed parliament exclusively on the country's foreign policy), he knew that "the South is not a homogeneous group of countries ... Yet," he continued:

the South is not a myth ... Their vision of a new international economic order proceeds from their common view that the old rules have not permitted equal opportunity or an equitable sharing of the fruits of effort.

The process ... required to redress their grievances involves the sharing of power, not power in the classical sense of armies and empires but in the sense of access to the means of development. Gaining that kind of power means gaining access to the international institutions where the decision-making process should take greater account of developing countries' specific difficulties: access to international capital markets, greater security in commodity prices and access to technological skills and to markets for manufactured products.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of that speech, Trudeau realized that his essential argument, that developing countries needed a greater say in the running of the world economy, was anathema to the conservative crowd that had won power in Washington and who, indeed, had found a fervent ally in Margaret Thatcher, elected in Britain in 1979. She had already told Trudeau that his ideas on North-South issues were 'soft-headed.' But Trudeau wanted his views on the record.

The notion of 'power-sharing' was effectively shelved for years to come. Indeed, the market-forces approach of the British and United States treasuries coloured G7 communiqués for the next decade. Summits repeated the mantra of the 'Washington Consensus': the only keys to development for all countries, including those emerging from state socialism in the east, were market forces, expanded and unrestricted world trade, and economic growth itself. 'A rising tide lifts all boats.' As Moises Naim put it: "in the early 1990s, millions around the world believed that it was just a matter of time before economic liberalisation, political reforms, and globalisation propelled the standard of living closer to that enjoyed by Americans"<sup>6</sup>.

The financial crises in Mexico in 1994 and Thailand in 1997 as well as the Russian default in 1998 sent a loud wake-up call that open markets and growth are not the only answer. Without positive and holistic attention to economic structures in less-developed countries—the banking sector, health, and education—they, and in the rebound, the developed countries, are acutely vulnerable to the swiftness of a global marketplace's cyclical or speculative change, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In any case, the most vulnerable among us have had no growth at all.

Today when I read the final draft (dated 15 October 1980) of the paper Trudeau and Gotlieb wanted to share with their G7 colleagues, I am struck by how closely Trudeau's diagnosis of the issues at that time resembles the global challenges of today. Power-sharing—today called international 'governance'—is what many of the substantively plausible protest at Seattle, Davos, and elsewhere has been about. The World Bank and the IMF have already altered their punitive structural adjustment practices of a decade ago to take much greater account of the differentiated structural characteristics of developing countries. New intergovernmental bodies, specifically the G20, are finally emerging to address the absence of developing countries from international economic decision-making. The plight of developing countries as a result of debt and their aspirations for access to markets are at last front and centre on the international agenda. Prime Minister Chrétien spoke at the World Economic Forum of poverty as "the worst form of violence". George Soros and others call for "stronger global institutions in social fields like...health, human rights, environmental protection and other public goods"<sup>7</sup>.

After 1981 Trudeau continued to pursue North-South issues, notably in his contacts with Third World leaders, for which he won considerable credit from them. In 1982, he co-hosted the Cancun North-South summit. But he got nowhere in convincing the doctrinaire conservatives in developed countries, and before long his main international preoccupations had shifted to the threat of nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers. The Reagan administration thought he was show-boating on both issues.

### **3.1 1980: East-West Confrontation**

When Trudeau returned as prime minister in February 1980, the world had lurched dangerously in his brief eight-month absence. A former British defence secretary, Denis Healey, later wrote that when the 1980s began, "the prospects for world peace seemed worse than at any time since 1945"<sup>8</sup>. Moslem fundamentalism had deposed the Shah in Iran and taken the United States embassy in Tehran hostage. Almost simultaneously, Russia invaded Afghanistan to save a client government from an Islamic revolt, thus beginning a ten-year war whose after-effects dominate world news today. And in Canada staff meetings at the Department of External Affairs were dominated by the shadow of the Russian threat to Poland.

Ronald Reagan won the presidency in the United States in large part because of a promise to reassert American pride and power. In his first press conference, on 29 January 1981, he labelled détente a 'one-way street' that the Soviet Un-

ion used to its advantage alone. Trudeau did not share that view. He believed that world peace relied on the ability of the two superpowers to get along, particularly in the Third World where he believed “we are more likely to face more crises that carry the risk, in the worst case, of confrontation between the super-powers ... The USSR is a superpower which claims the right to be heard on the same terms as its rival on the problems which affect any region of the world”. He proposed that East and West “redefine a mutually acceptable code of behaviour for international relationships”. There was a caveat: “before this can be done, an answer must be found to the crisis in Afghanistan, whose invasion goes against everything that the western world as well as the Third World considers”. That being said, he was able to add: “Personally, I believe that the good sense of Soviet leaders will prevail”. He believed “the world could rely on a basic compatibility of interests between the US and USSR”.

Trudeau’s critics accused him of being ‘soft on communism.’ Not so—his defining speech spoke at the outset of the human values that we in the West say we hold in common. “Surely the most basic is freedom, the freedom of individuals and of nations, the political freedom which distinguishes East from West, the freedom of the market system upon which our economies are based ... it is the very foundation and life-giving spirit of the societies which we have built in the various countries of the West”<sup>9</sup>. When Trudeau spoke of a basic ‘compatibility of mutual interest,’ he meant in avoiding confrontation, the possibility of which he believed was growing.

By 1982, the anti-war movement in Europe and in the United States at the time had taken on new life over an escalating arms race. Soviet modernization of its inter-continental ballistic missiles led to the deployment of NATO intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Germany. In Canada, the government’s decision to allow the United States to test cruise missiles over Canadian territory was the most controversial local issue, though Trudeau, who did not seem to believe that the system was inherently de-stabilizing or that it added to the world danger, did not feel strongly about it. He felt more strongly about the collision between East and West in poor surrogate battlefields in Central America or Angola.

### **3.2 1983: The Year of Living Dangerously**

Perhaps the most dangerous year was 1983. Although it began with the new, though ailing, Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, reversing the Brezhnev Doctrine by saying that the Warsaw Treaty Organization should form a non-aggression pact with NATO, Ronald Reagan read this as a sign of Soviet weakness. He re-

ferred to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” and its leadership as “the focus of evil in the modern world”<sup>10</sup>. In March 1983, he launched the United States on the space-based strategic defence initiative (SDI) known as ‘Star Wars.’

Trudeau thought the relationship between the United States and the USSR was becoming too high-risk. Notes from the time record him telling Reagan at the Williamsburg G7 summit that summer that ‘this Star Wars business would lead us closer to war.’ This may have been when Margaret Thatcher first called him ‘wet.’

### **3.3 KAL 007**

On 1 September 1983, Korean Air flight 007 with 269 people aboard, en route from JFK airport in New York to Seoul, was shot down by a Soviet interceptor as it drifted 365 miles off course into Soviet airspace after a refuelling stop in Anchorage, Alaska. Trudeau focused immediately on the dangers of escalation. I was sent that same day from Washington to Princeton by Trudeau’s key aide, Bob Fowler, to ask George Kennan, and old Soviet hand, on Trudeau’s behalf how the Soviet leadership might be expected to behave in the rapidly escalating crisis.

In the immediate aftermath of the incident, United States officials implied that the Soviet Union knew that the plane was a civilian airliner when they ordered it shot down. Bill Casey, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, maintained that the Soviet pilot had indicated in communications with the ground commanders that he could clearly see it. In fact, intelligence intercepts, shared with Canadians, rather indicated the opposite—the pilot could not see the plane clearly enough to determine its status. Obviously, although Reagan himself was quite restrained, some senior officials were using what was a terrible mistake to advance an anti-Soviet agenda and their own personal and political profiles. More to the point, Trudeau feared they were seriously upgrading the levels of tension and danger. As Seymour Hersh reported in his book, *The Target is Destroyed*, ‘only one’ foreign leader ‘spoke out’—Trudeau<sup>11</sup>.

During a debate in the House of Commons Trudeau again said: “I do not believe that the people in the Kremlin deliberately murdered or killed some 200 or 300 passengers in the Korean airliner. I do not believe that. I believe it was a tragic accident, an accident of war”<sup>12</sup>. Later, he acknowledged that he based his view on highly classified intelligence, which indicated that the Soviet Union did not know the plane was civilian. “It was obvious to me very early in the game”, Hersh has quoted Trudeau as saying, “that the Reagan people were

trying to create another bone of contention with the Soviets when they didn't have a leg to stand on"<sup>13</sup>. Trudeau was also worried by the way the Soviet Union denied responsibility. He believed that the two superpowers put everyone at risk as they jockeyed for position on such a volatile issue.

And so, he launched his personal 'peace initiative,' flying around the world to meet twenty-three heads of state within a month because he wanted to say that all world leaders had an obligation to urge the superpowers to back off. But, as Hersh concludes, 'his peace initiative went nowhere.' Other leaders were reluctant to get involved, at least at Trudeau's urging. The Reagan administration, with which the Trudeau government had been running a host of quarrels since 1981, tried to make light of what they viewed as Trudeau's interference. The U.S. Under-Secretary of state, Lawrence Eagleburger, quipped that the prime minister 'must be smoking pot.'

But Trudeau never gave up. On 15 December 1983, he held his last summit meeting with Reagan. First, Fowler found Trudeau a great joke to trade with the president. Then, Gotlieb worked with him on a new approach to Reagan who, by the way, was always genial with Trudeau. The idea was to urge the president to let the world know that he, Reagan, was not the hawk he seemed—he was first and foremost a man who profoundly wished for peace. We believed Reagan was impressed by that advice<sup>14</sup>. Several months later, when Trudeau resigned as prime minister, Reagan was undertaking some of the most profound decisions in history toward renewing détente, nuclear de-escalation, and arms reduction. I would not pretend that Trudeau caused Reagan's much discussed 'reversal,' but it is true that in the end Reagan's view was not so different from that Trudeau had been urging.

#### **4 Epilogue: Trudeau in Retirement**

Later in 1984, Trudeau, the private citizen, received the Albert Einstein Peace Award in Washington for his efforts to encourage superpower conciliation. He was taken aback by a challenging question after the speech from Hendrik Hertzberg, a friendly liberal and at that time the editor of the *New Republic*, who objected to Trudeau's position of implied 'neutrality' between Moscow and Washington, which 'balanced the behavioral characteristics of the two alliances.' "How could I be neutral?" he asked me as we waited later for his commercial flight along with other citizen-passengers. He thought his "position as the leader of an utterly democratic nation and as an Alliance member should speak for itself". To Trudeau, it should have been obvious that his "over-arching preoccupation was the possibility of nuclear war". I wrote to

him later, by way of explanation, that “in the US there is no real consensus on national security issues. The “moral” difference between their democracy and Soviet society is more important ... If arms control needs to imply some sort of moral equidistance, they won’t have it”<sup>15</sup>. The misunderstanding about his role continued to perplex Trudeau.

A decade later, when I was ambassador to what was now democratic Russia, I visited Trudeau at his eagle’s nest law office in Montreal to report on the state of things in Russia, whose fortunes he followed avidly. “Do you think people will look back and think we weren’t hard-line enough with those guys in Moscow?” he asked. I replied that what he did was always in the interests of people, not the Kremlin. I told him that many remembered his words on a visit there when he took pains to say that the West owed the Soviet people a lot for the enormous price they had paid in the Second World War—20 million lives. They were first and foremost Russian and Ukrainian lives, not communist lives.

From my experience in Russia, Russians, especially dissidents and reformers, believed that Trudeau, the human rights jurist, had understood them as well as anyone in the West. American conservatives claim Reagan’s defence spending increases convinced the Soviet leadership it could not compete and thus hastened the end of the cold war. But the ‘father of glasnost and perestroika,’ Alexander Yakovlev, who had been Gorbachev’s principal adviser for change, always claimed in later conversations in Moscow that his evening talks with Trudeau in Ottawa, where the reformer Yakovlev had been exiled for ten years as ambassador, were a key inspiration in his conclusions the Soviet system had to change completely. Indeed, this is the course that Yakovlev proposed to Gorbachev when Yakovlev hosted him on his first eye-awakening trip to the West, to Canada as minister of agriculture in 1983. Trudeau’s belief in the value of reasoning together had obviously paid great dividends.

Everything, of course, is in the timing. In foreign policy, if you are not a great power, what you achieve is rarely going to be very great. But your ‘reach should exceed your grasp, or what’s a heaven for?’ Trudeau’s changes to Canada undeniably were great. And though it may not have seemed so when he left office, his insights and influence also left his mark on the great issues facing the world.

Today, globalization has made us more interdependent than ever. There are benefits. But such globalized ills as human trafficking, organized crime, terrorism, or epidemics can now spread like wildfire. Bill Clinton, who gave the

Diana, Princess of Wales, lecture on AIDS in London on 13 December 2001 unfortunately waited until he was out of office to urge the powerful countries to focus on all those suffering in the world—the 40 million with AIDS, the billions in poverty—both as a moral imperative and in our security interest because, he said, echoing Trudeau 20 years earlier: “In a world without walls, these people are our neighbours too”. Trudeau, to his great credit, tried to make a difference while he was prime minister. Resisted at the time by the more powerful, he could take satisfaction today in a G8 agenda for power-sharing, which, under the leadership, after all, of one of his own ministers, bears his mark.

### Author’s Note

Jeremy Kinsman is High Commissioner for Canada, London, and former ambassador to Rome and to Moscow. Although he was not a member of Prime Minister Trudeau’s inner circle, Jeremy Kinsman served him, as did many others, over the years in question. The views and recollections in this article which was first presented as a paper at a colloquium on Pierre Elliott Trudeau at Southampton Institute, in December 2001, are the author’s.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> sess, 32<sup>nd</sup> parl, vol x, 15 June 1981, 10593.
- <sup>2</sup> *Partners in Development: Report of the Commission on International Development* (New York: Praeger, 1970); *North/South: A Program for Survival. Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1980).
- <sup>3</sup> Ivan Head and Pierre Trudeau, *The Canadian Way: Shaping Canada’s Foreign Policy, 1968–1984* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), chap 2.
- <sup>4</sup> Mitchell Sharp, “Canada–US relations: options for the future”, *International Perspectives*.
- <sup>5</sup> House of Commons, *Debates*, 15 June 1981, 10956.
- <sup>6</sup> Moisés Naím, “Why the world loves to hate America”, *Financial Times* (London), 7 December 2001, 17.
- <sup>7</sup> Helen Epstein and Lincoln Chen, “Can AIDS be stopped?” *New York Review of Books*, March 14, 2002.
- <sup>8</sup> Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life*, 1989.
- <sup>9</sup> House of Commons, *Debates*, 15 June 1981, 10595.

- <sup>10</sup> Ronald Reagan, speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, Florida, 8 March 1983.
- <sup>11</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *The Target is Destroyed: What Really Happened to Flight 007 and What America Knew About it* (New York: Random House, 1986).
- <sup>12</sup> Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> sess, 32<sup>nd</sup> parl, 4 October 1983, 27720.
- <sup>13</sup> Hersh, *The Target is Destroyed*, 245.
- <sup>14</sup> Nancy Reagan, whose influence was vast, had been pushing the same theme with her husband.
- <sup>15</sup> Private correspondence with Trudeau.