

Elizabeth Cobbett

School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies (PPL), University of East
Anglia

e.cobbett@uea.ac.uk

Ray Silvius

Department of Political Science, University of Winnipeg

r.silvius@uwinnipeg.ca

Introduction: Canada and the World in 25 Years—Will Anyone Be Listening?

This special issue began life as a lively panel at Visions for Canada 2042, a series of events held in March 2017 to commemorate 75 years of Carleton University’s Faculty for Public Affairs. This collection of short articles builds upon, and offers a variety of answers to, our lead question, “Will anyone be listening to Canada as it negotiates the world of 2042?”

If bold predictions are the preferred method for prognosticators and pundits, our contributors are decidedly more circumspect in offering a straightforward picture of how the world will receive Canada and Canadians in 25 years’ time. Nonetheless, the analytical and imaginative undertaking that we offer here is governed by the understanding that the global environment Canada faces at present and in the medium future is very different than that to which it was accustomed during the “long twentieth century.” It comes across very clearly from all contributors that not all regions of the globe will be “listening” or paying attention to Canada

to the same degree as the world undergoes important political and economic shifts. This raises the question of whether countries around the world will *need* to listen to Canada in 25 years, the matter to which contributors to this special issue broach through a variety of arguments. While our prophecies are tentative, and although our individual analyses focus on different components of the shifting world order of which Canada is a part, there is broad consensus that Canada's foreign policy needs to speedily adjust to a profoundly different set of global circumstances. In excavating the present to better determine the various factors that have led to prevailing articulations of Canada's international identity and conduct, our endeavour enables us to reimagine the past as much as envision the future.

To begin with reference to the concluding contribution, Germain argues that the North Atlantic corridor of power is in the process of coming under, what he calls, the "shadow of geopolitics." As Germain reminds us, debates as to whether the American century is over are hotly contested—and, frankly, nothing new. An emerging China will challenge, but ultimately not unseat, the United States as the primary organizing power in the global political economy. Nonetheless, the current distribution of global power relations is under a profound reorganization due to the complex economic, cultural, and demographic variables embodied in the so-called 'emerging powers.' Shadows cast by these new geopolitical hot spots and spheres of influence are, in turn, shaping Canada, its place in the greater scheme of global politics, and will increasingly and necessarily shape its foreign policy. In Germain's estimation, the *longue durée* of American financial, political, and cultural power in the North Atlantic sphere will rediscipline Canada into reorienting its relations to American-led structures, despite increased pressures, and opportunities, from China.

China is not ‘rising’ alone and a corresponding question pertains to how Canada will adapt and respond to a global system reshaped by countries beyond the West. Consequently, there is a need to rethink the guiding assumption of much Anglo-American (and indeed Canadian) thinking that the structuring power for world order is vested in the trilateral relations of North America, Europe, and Japan. One way, therefore, to answer the question of whether anyone will be listening to Canada is to ask where the core of global political economic power will be in 25 years. As Cobbett sets out, the global political economic “core”—the average location of economic activity across geographies, taking into account all gross domestic product (GDP) produced across the planet (Quah 2011), —is moving east, toward Asia and away from the North Atlantic corridor of power. As this core of global economy and power moves east, it pulls on Canada in two directions. The first is a tug across Europe, in direction of India and China, as the centre of economic gravity gradually moves towards China and the Asia Pacific Rim. This is turning Europe eastwards as it makes new connections to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The second is a westwards movement, across the North American landmass continues to turn to the Pacific Rim. Vancouver has long served as a gateway for the flow of goods and services across the Pacific.

Paltiel develops his argument along the same lines, that Canada’s centre of gravity will effectively realign inexorably toward the Pacific. In the process, a hegemonic Canadian mythos that has held the Anglo-European experience as the story of Canada must be replaced by that which has a more inclusive present and more accurately represented past. Paltiel’s article is perhaps the most forthright in our collection in suggesting that Canada’s predominating historical self-representations have been constructed on a foundation of disproportionate white, Anglo-European power. In so doing, he invites us to consider the past as much as the future,

emphasizing the extent to which Canada has historically played a “gateway” role between Asia and North America, with the Pacific component of the Canadian story subordinated to that of the Atlantic. In sum, Canada is no longer sitting atop the only great economic power of the twenty-first century, but rather finds itself in shifting geopolitics where an Asian century will disrupt the axis of power between North America and Western Europe. Similarly ‘de-centering’ the Canadian mythos of inheriting and extending European modernity, Silvius concludes that Canadians’ future might lie with re-centering questions of Indigeneity not only in our own polity but in our engagements with others countries.

These are therefore times of high uncertainty for Canada, radically different to the latter half of the twentieth century. Real GDP of high-income countries is a sixth smaller than it would have been had we not had the Great Recession following on the financial crisis of a decade ago. Not surprisingly, this complex restructuring of the global political economy presents a challenging environment for Canadians. While Canada weathered the financial global storm rather well, it is now uncomfortably close to a US advocating “America First” protectionism and a return to the drawing board for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). How then will the current chilling of relations with the US impact on these vital connections? Lilly points out that the image of stable, predictable, and friendly bilateral relations with the United States is being brusquely reconsidered. Chrystia Freeland (2017), Canada’s current minister of foreign affairs, recognizes exactly this, stating that international relationships that had seemed immutable for 70 years are now being called into question. Canada’s relationship with the US, in short, is not immovable. In her contribution, Lilly eschews the uncertainty surrounding contemporary Canada-US relations to focus on what she argues are more measurable certainties: Canada’s aging population and declining birth rates will necessitate the use of immigration to

bolster the workforce that will sustain the population. The country's relative economic decline *vis-à-vis* its North American counterparts might be staved off, in part, by its high performance in education and corresponding preparedness for future workplaces. For the foreseeable future, our economic links remain closely knitted, as Haussman underlines, as each Canadian province lists the United States as its top export destination. Yet, as Haussman equally emphasizes, statistics point to the hollowness of Trump's argument that the US is getting a "bad deal" in trade relations. US exports to Canada are critical, as the country relies on its northern neighbour to purchase its airplanes, machinery, autos and auto parts, boilers, and other goods.

If the broader global landscape beyond North America is indeed shifting in a manner demonstrated by our contributors, so too will thinking about Canada's place in global society. Canada's emergence as a middle power, Paltiel reviews, was steered by both the idealism of global governance through international institutions fostering collaboration and co-operation, as by realism of great power politics during the bipolarity of the Cold War. Whether this role will exist moving forward and, if so, which shape it will take, is unclear. Yet, as Friesen correctly reminds us, Canada has made substantial contributions to the development of a resilient and functional, if imperfect, financial system. It has valuable experience, as Friesen puts it, of navigating the tensions between economic growth and stability inherent in the international system, developing just the right amount of regulation in a post-Bretton world to underpin economic expansion while warding off excessive exuberance. The outstanding example is Canada's robust response to the 2008 financial crisis which sprung up at the heart of global financial capitalism, just south of the border in Wall St. There are possibilities that this history and experience will stand Canada in good stead as it scans the global scene for future leadership

roles; it might be precisely here, in a world muddling the steering of the financial global system, that Canada will be listened to by global players.

Canada, however, will need to come to terms with the realisation, as Silvius reminds us, that while liberal internationalism was always global in aspiration, it was never global in *structure*. Canada will be less ‘embedded’ in this liberal world, less in its ‘core’ and more exposed to the vicissitudes of a globe undergoing realignment. Yet, as Silvius stresses, the “rise of the rest” does not necessarily lead to an antagonistic multipolar world. Moreover, it may not be a multipolar world at all. China is a possible *global* hegemonic rival to the United States, complicating the claim that we are clearly moving to a *multipolar* global political economy. And, importantly, as Silvius argues, in current geopolitical flashpoints between Canada and Russia, the external challenges to liberal internationalism need not result in international rivalries and antagonisms.

There are obviously many unknowns. But what is apparent and clear is that Canada faces a world of shifting global demographics, political economic power, and governance. This means that Canada will not only become more acutely aware there are always edges to global politics, places and spaces that are either not of interest to the powers-that-be or caught, as Mbembe puts it, in the vortex of colonialism (Hofmeyer and Mbembe 2006), but may find itself increasingly in more shifting waters. This turns also the focus inwards, should Canadians prove collectively capable in genuine, deepening efforts at Indigenous-settler and postcolonial reconciliation in its own spaces, it might legitimately offer up its practice as one worth emulating. The same logic holds as it pertains to any number of matters deemed central to the Canadian imaginary—environmental stewardship, welfare provision, and gender-based equity—but the onus will be on Canadians to demonstrate their successes without downplaying their shortcomings if we are to

have any currency in shaping the next 25 years on a *global* scale. This speaks directly to our strategies towards the Global South.

In line with these voices, African countries find themselves in a world increasingly influenced by emerging powers. Dominance of the west will give way to a context reminiscent of periods where Africans historically interacted simultaneously with both the west and east. Countries from the Middle East, Russia, China, India, and Brazil are all strengthening their diplomatic and economic ties with the continent. This opens up areas for negotiation by African countries on how development of their national economies and of the continent will be pursued. As Cobbett states, Africa in the twenty-first century seeks new forms of relationships with international partners, beyond habitual aid templates, to meet its huge development goals. In this regard, Canada needs to move beyond defining its relations with African nations through its narrow mining interests to respond, rather, to the African Development Bank's (AfDB) call for economic transformation through inclusive growth strategies. Regrettably, Trudeau's "Canada is back" international campaign, announced after his electoral win of 2015, does not look set to change much, let alone the status quo that has shaped Canada's policy toward Africa.

This represents the continuation of Canada's slide in international engagement begun decades ago. Canada previously held moral currency in the area of peace and conflict resolution, but, as Coffie highlights, African refugees, and countries that host millions of refugees, are largely ignored in Ottawa's foreign policy and assistance budget. The Federal Government made draconian cuts to Canada's open border approach that have not yet been rectified by the current government and most of these are hosted in regions where the displacement takes place, not in the west. Therefore, Coffie points out that African countries would have reason to listen to

Canada if it contributed financial and technical support to refugee-hosting countries *in* Africa, as well as partaking in a return to active participation in peacekeeping across the continent. Chiefly, Coffie argues, Canada needs to demonstrate its commitment to collaborative approaches to conflict prevention on the African continent by contributing meaningfully to new security and conflict prevention mechanisms that have originated in the African Union.

And so, to the future. We conclude with Germain's observation that Canada's future world will, in all likelihood, be less welcoming and inviting than the one it has known under *Pax Americana*. In response to the question as to whether anyone will be listening to Canada in 25 years, we argue that Canada will need to seriously rethink its foreign policy beyond the accustomed comfort of sitting atop the USA in order to develop new strategies during what is becoming the Asia century. Challenges facing Canada come from places both familiar and unfamiliar, as will the opportunities. To consider are new dynamics of shifting cores and peripheries, the rise of former great powers, including China and Russia, and the emerging economies that will profit from opportunities created in their wake. The Global South expects more from Canada's foreign policy; it cannot be business as usual. The overriding message is that the time for complacency is over.

Acknowledgements

We would like to warmly thank Randall Germain for his great idea in beginning this conversation of where Canada will be and how it will be seen in 25 years and for his help in steering this special issue

References

<eref>Freeland, Chrystia. 2017. "Address by Minister Freeland on Canada's Foreign Policy Priorities." *Global Affairs Canada*, 6 June 6. https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/address_by_ministerfreelandoncanadasforeignpolicypriorities.html.</eref>

<jrn>Hofmeyer, Isabel, and Achille Mbembe. 2006. "Achille Mbembe in Conversation with Isabel Hofmeyr." *South African Historical Journal* 56 (1): 177–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470609464970>.</jrn>

<jrn>Quah, Danny. 2011. "The Global Economy's Shifting Centre of Gravity." *Global Policy* 2 (1): 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-5899.2010.00066.x>.</jrn>