

SO NEAR

THE PUBLIC AND HIDDEN WORLDS OF CANADA-US RELATIONS

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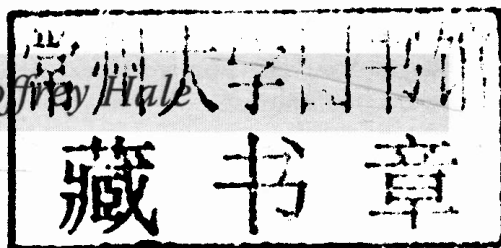
SO YET

GEOFFREY HALE

SO NEAR yet so FAR

THE PUBLIC AND HIDDEN WORLDS
OF CANADA-US RELATIONS

Geoffrey Hale



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1

INTRODUCTION

The Elephant and the Beaver

Proximity and Distance in Perspective

Pierre Trudeau once famously likened the Canada–US relationship to that of a mouse and an elephant.¹ Although this analogy suggests that the former's world shakes every time the latter rolls over, it also speaks to traditional Canadian outlooks on the two countries' respective national characters. An elephant is very large and quite capable of dominating its environment without much attention to the preoccupations of smaller animals. The mouse, on the other hand, seems to have a distinct problem with its self-image. It is small, agile, able to fit through places the elephant would never think of travelling, but potentially vulnerable to the lurching around of its much larger neighbour and apparently rather insecure about the whole business.

This image of the Canada–US relationship is captured in the titles of a series of books written over several decades: *Neighbours Taken for Granted*, *Forgotten Partnership*, and, more recently, *Invisible and Inaudible in Washington*.² So, in a way, does the title of this book, *So Near Yet So Far*. This phrase, derived from the late-nineteenth-century Mexican strongman Porfirio Diaz's exclamation "Poor Mexico: so far from God, so near to the United States," can be taken as a lament or as a hard-headed recognition of reality.

Certainly, from the perspective of the animal kingdom, the elephant analogy works well. The United States is large, with interests that stretch as far as the eye can see (or farther). At the same time, like most large animals, its

size enables it to dominate its immediate surroundings and ignore all but the largest predators when it so chooses. When alarmed or taken by surprise, it can stampede in any direction, trampling other animals heedless enough to get in its way. However, when one looks around an unstable and often violent world, one finds many countries that, given the chance, would happily exchange their large, ambitious neighbours for Canada's border of 8,893 kilometres with the United States.

Canadians can identify, if they wish, with the small, cute, and slightly neurotic mouse of Trudeau's analogy, but they have other national symbols, such as the beaver. Small, amphibious, industrious, resilient, the beaver is a reasonable symbol, with deep historical roots, for a certain kind of Canadian who bridges traditional linguistic and cultural solitudes. Despite its size, the beaver finds ways to function within a much bigger natural environment and to shape parts of that environment for its own security and comfort.

Certainly, there are limits to this analogy as applied to Canada-US relations. Elephants and beavers generally do not share the same ecosystem. Were they to do so, chances are that the denizens of the beaver colony would be far more conscious of the local elephant herd on its way to the watering hole than the other way around. Yet Canadians and Americans do share a continent (as do Mexicans, if largely beyond the political horizons of the former).

This book explores the evolving context of the Canada-US relationship and the ways in which the smaller country attempts to manage that relationship at different levels. On the one hand, Canadians want to make the most of the opportunities provided by their proximity to the world's largest economy and its dynamic society, whatever its economic challenges of recent years. On the other, most Canadians place a high value on preserving and, where possible, expanding opportunities for choice – or “exercising policy discretion” – in their domestic and foreign policies. Rather than the historical lament of Mexican political life and culture, *So Near Yet So Far* expresses the continuing paradox³ evoked by the relationship from the multiple perspectives of both Canadians and Americans.

Canada's physical and cultural proximity to the United States leads many Americans and other observers to overlook differences between the two countries – not least many Canadians' heartfelt desires to be different and to have Americans (and others) notice the differences. It is no accident, as discussed at greater length in Chapter 4, that these Canadians' assertions of their differences from the United States or from Americans – two

notably different concepts – are most intense when the government of their southern neighbour is most assertive in exercising its claims to global political or economic leadership. Nor is it an accident that Americans are confused when such cultural and political differences are framed as questions of Canadian “identity” – given the tendency of politicians on both sides of the border to speak of the two countries as “friends” and “family,” not just neighbours, when trying to cultivate mutually beneficial relations.⁴

Canada is “so near” to the United States in terms of economic interdependence and integration. Shifts in US economic policies or the domestic political environment often affect Canadian interests directly. This impact is usually most significant on the economic security and opportunities – major preoccupations of any Canadian government – that arise from the two countries’ economic and sometimes social interdependence. This interdependence, driven by a combination of physical proximity, market forces (i.e., the actions and preferences of businesses, consumers, and investors on both sides of the border), and government policies that accommodate and reinforce these realities, often blurs distinctions between domestic and international policies in both countries.

Social interdependence can reflect the accustomed interactions of citizens in border regions, the actual or threatened spillover of environmental problems, food safety scares, outbreaks of disease from one country to the other, or the efforts of individual citizens or organized groups to take advantage of policy differences between the two countries. For the beaver to maintain its capacity to choose economic policies that serve its priorities and interests, it must pay careful attention to the habits and actions of the elephant whether or not the latter returns the compliment. At the same time, as noted by American political scientist Helen Milner, “cooperation among nations is affected less by fears of other countries’ [actions] ... than it is by the domestic distributional consequences of cooperative endeavours.”⁵

Another reality of this interdependence – particularly when combined with the global scope of US foreign, security, and international economic policies and the structure of the American political system – is that most issues of bilateral economic interdependence are dealt with in the context of US *domestic* policy processes and, often, US *domestic* politics. From the perspective of American foreign policy, Canada’s political and economic interests are important only to the extent that they reinforce, complement, or impede broader US strategic objectives and the policies chosen to achieve them. US domestic policies tend to engage Canadian interests and

objectives only to the extent that they affect politically important domestic interests in the United States. At such times, the political priorities of interests based in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, or Vancouver can be “so far” from the consciousness or priorities of American politicians or journalists that navigating the cross-currents of American bureaucratic or congressional politics requires skilful and creative management by Canadian diplomats and interest groups.

These realities highlight the disparity between the importance of American political and economic processes (whether as sources of opportunities or risks) to Canadians and the latter’s limited relevance, importance, or visibility to Americans, except in the very selective contexts of particular interest groups.⁶ Indeed, growing numbers of Americans are likely to think of Mexico rather than Canada when they think of cross-border issues in North America given the progressive shifts of population, wealth, and power toward the American south and west and the rising influence of rapidly growing Mexican–American (and other Hispanic) communities across the United States.⁷

The paradox of *So Near Yet So Far* applies to Americans as much as it does to Canadians or Mexicans. Americans are more likely to understand the realities and complexities of interdependence with their northern and southern neighbours if they live in border regions or have close economic, cultural, or family ties across the border. However, the normal human tendency toward self-absorption often leads individuals and social groups to project their own realities, desires, and expectations onto those “others” outside their immediate circles. This projection can easily lead to disappointments and misunderstandings when, guided by their own perspectives and priorities, “they” do not live up to “our” expectations. Americans are not much different from Mexicans or Canadians in this respect, except that their country’s relative size, power, and self-confidence limit their felt need to know or engage their neighbours, particularly the more distant ones. However, the spread of North American integration increases the challenges of what political scientists describe as “intermesticity”⁸ – the blurring of traditional distinctions between international and domestic policies and politics.

These challenges are visible in recent American debates over issues ranging from the use of federal stimulus policies to promote local industries, to border security, and to immigration policies. They are inherent in ongoing debates over the relationship between America’s sovereignty and capacity

for self-government and international institutions whose effectiveness depends to some extent on American participation and leadership. These debates take place in Canada (and Mexico) as well, though often in different contexts. The ways in which Americans treat their neighbours are likely to condition the ways in which the governments and peoples of other countries respond to American interests, policies, and efforts to provide leadership around the world. American leadership on regional and global issues is far more likely to be effective when approached as a process of building alliances based on complementary and overlapping interests, objectives, and values while recognizing the sometimes competing interests of other nations, than when treated as a simple exercise in power politics.⁹

Similarly, the ways in which Canadians (and Mexicans) seek to protect and advance their own interests when engaging American governments and the broader American political system can contribute to greater American understanding of how their respective national interests can complement one another while also differing in many ways. Alternatively, they can reinforce the mutual incomprehension and opportunities for political and economic conflict that are never far from the surface given persistent differences in size and power and the tendency of some groups to exploit memories of historical grievances to serve their own agendas.

This is a book for people who wish to approach these issues with open minds rather than preconceived political or ideological agendas or a misplaced sense of moral (or cultural) superiority – phenomena that can occur in any cultural setting and across the ideological spectrum. It is intended as a journey of exploration, not as a definitive set of answers to the questions of a relationship whose scale, scope, complexity, and continuing evolution defy pat answers.

The book explores the fundamental challenges of the Canada–US relationship and the ways in which they shape both US policies toward Canada and Canadian efforts to engage and influence those policies. It examines the different levels and aspects of US policy making toward Canada – and the different institutional settings in which they take place. It engages US policies since the 1990s in three broad policy clusters: “homeland security” policies and how they affect economic integration and interdependence, the management of trade disputes arising from policy differences and interest group competition, and the evolution and partial integration of energy policies in each country, including the related influence of environmental issues. Finally, *So Near Yet So Far* suggests some tentative lessons to be

drawn from this exploration, their implications for Canada's international economic policies, and their more sector-specific implications for bilateral and trilateral relations in North America.

Key Features of the Canada-US Relationship

The relationship between the United States and Canada, though unique in some ways, epitomizes the relations between major powers and smaller neighbours with which they share cultural similarities and a degree of interdependence but also have fundamental differences in size, power, and the relative importance of the relationship to each country.

The Canada-US relationship has been the subject of a number of studies in recent years. Hoberg, followed more recently by Bow and Lennox, have explored Canada's capacity for policy autonomy or policy choice in a wide range of settings. Clarkson has analyzed Canada's policy relations, both strategic and sectoral, within the broader context of governance within North America.¹⁰ Dymont has explored the ideological polarization of Canadian domestic debates on bilateral relations and argued for a new "interest-based" paradigm that acknowledges interdependence as an "enduring situation to be managed," not a problem requiring a solution.¹¹ Heynen and Higginbotham and Mouafo and colleagues have documented the mechanics of "advancing Canada's interests within the United States" and the detailed interactions of transgovernmental relations at the departmental and agency levels. Gattinger and Hale and, more recently, Anderson and Sands have sought to map the contours of cross-border sectoral and subsectoral relations as part of a broader study of factors structuring policy relations.¹²

Gattinger and Hale note five major and enduring structural features of the Canada-US policy relationship: asymmetries on multiple levels; the primacy of economic factors, especially for Canada, in shaping the two countries' growing interdependence; the lack of formal political integration (bilateral or trilateral) or the institutions necessary to facilitate it, which has reinforced what they characterize as the shift from government to governance; the extent of policy decentralization in both countries – characterized as "the staggering ... breadth, depth and complexity of ... administrative relations"; and "continuing policy differentiation amid economic and policy integration."¹³

A sixth important feature noted by Clarkson is the integration of decentralized North American governance within comparable global systems so

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