

A Compelling Read on Canadian Foreign Policy

Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson

Brave New Canada: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.

Review by John Barrett

For the foreign policy junkies scouring the media for opinions and analyses, Burney and Hampson are household names. Their most recent work—*Brave New Canada: Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World*—is a compilation of policy prescriptions that build, as the authors acknowledge, on a 2012 report co-authored with Thomas d'Aquino and Len Edwards. The result is a book that can be read on two levels.

If you are looking for a punchy, sharply written resumé of how we got to where we are today in the world, this is it. But the authors have greater aspirations. Their goal is to create foreign policy for Canada. This is the second level: a guide to policy decisions in a complex and turbulent world. And here it offers clear insights and compelling recommendations.

First, the circumstances around us. The authors see five key trends “reshaping our world.” The US is more focused on itself today; the global economy is undergoing a major transformation; international institutions are declining in effectiveness and relevance; the Post-Cold-War order is breaking down and new geostrategic rivalries and threats are emerging; and pluralistic democratic values are under siege in many parts of the world.

What should Canada's response be? That depends on a basic premise: Canada has to engage with the world's fast-growing emerging market economies if we are to secure our country's future. More precisely, we

must seek real, committed strategic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region—and actively pursue regional confidence-building measures to that end.

The starting point for such engagement is squarely economic: “...the more we do to enhance trade and economic partnerships—and that should be the driving force—the more committed we will need to be on issues of security and stability.” They propose a “Third Option With Legs”, aimed at reducing our excessive reliance on the US economy through closer economic partnerships with the EU and major Asian and Latin-American countries. While the recently signed CETA agreement may satisfy this with respect to the EU, the real area of attention is Asia-Pacific.

What distinguishes this book is its interest-based realism. For example, as much as Canada needs emerging markets for trade and investment, we can't be going there cap in hand. State-owned enterprises in these countries do not play by conventional, market-based rules. As the authors note, Canada's negotiating positions must insist that the playing field is level and the economic partnerships mutually advantageous.

As the authors chart Canada's course through turbulent waters, they issue a few broadsides. Many hit the target (and make for lively reading); some miss. “Multilateralism” is a particular *bête noire*. They roundly criticize Copenhagen (climate change); Doha (trade); Dubai (World Conference on International Telecommunications); UN Security Council (Syria). The G20 is castigated. They want UN and Security Council reform—who doesn't? Such criticism is warranted; but it's not the whole story. Forging deeper bilateral relationships with emerging and Asia-Pacific countries occurs just as much in multilateral institutions. Constant interaction on international security matters within, for example, the International Atomic Energy Agency or the UN Office on Drugs and Crime presents such opportunities

The section on non-proliferation is rather thin. The authors call for “intensified Canadian diplomacy in nuclear non-proliferation” and to “put money and diplomatic capital into serious arms control projects”—but where and how would this capital best

be spent? How do we engage in the US administration's nuclear security initiatives, the complexities of dealing with Iran, UNSCR 1540 on non-proliferation, compliance with nuclear-related treaties and agreement?

That said, interesting and cogent ideas flow throughout the chapters. One overarching recommendation is that Canada return to the use of confidence-building measures of a kind that worked between East and West during the Cold War. Such measures can be applied to a broad range of issues because they open and nurture deeper political relationships that are in our interest. Canada has been—and still is—a master of this craft and the authors point to ways in which such skill can be applied anew.

The sections on conflict prevention, promoting pluralism, and re-directing Canada's development assistance policies bring home the authors' hard-nosed approach. As much as one might want values to lead the way in foreign policy, Canada's ultimate security and economic well-being is best preserved and enhanced by putting our interests first. Human rights, pluralism, freedom of religious expression—these are critical to promoting long-term political stability and good governance in the world. But that's not why one has engaged in conflict prevention in the first place.

Burney and Hampson have established the point of departure for any serious discussion of Canada's foreign policy—of where it is day, of where it should be going. As the authors say, in meeting the challenges of a changing world, we must be “strong, bold, committed, and driven by interest and real conviction.”

That makes it a compelling read for foreign policy professionals, political parties and public commentators. **P**

John Barrett is President and CEO of the Canadian Nuclear Association, and a former Canadian ambassador to Austria and Slovakia, as well as to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. barrettj@cna.ca