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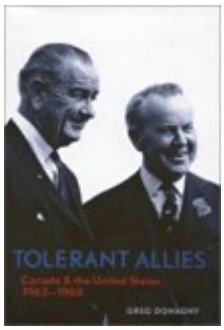
Greg Donaghy. *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963-1968.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. x + 238 pp. $75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7735-2431-6.



Reviewed by Andrew Preston

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In the 1990s, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright gave definition to what had been an unusually incoherent U.S. foreign policy. Her view of America's role in the world--defined by the pithy, characteristically pugnacious catch phrases "assertive multilateralism" and the "indispensable nation"--was unabashedly robust and interventionist.[1] That the United States is assertive--multilateral or otherwise--was not exactly news to Canadians. As Canadians know all too well, the difference between "assertive multilateralism" and unilateralism, or a "coalition of the willing," is very small indeed. Canadians were even less shocked to hear that the United States is the "indispensable nation," although Albright's neighbors to the north have always been much more ambivalent about the implications of American indispensability than she would have guessed or cared to know. The venerable Canadian diplomat John W. Holmes once wearily described the Canadian relationship to the United States as "life with uncle."[2] The phrase was meant to be neither wholly negative nor wholly positive--"life with uncle" was inevitable and brought with it nearly as many problems as benefits. It is, in other words, simply a fact of life. For Canadians, then, the United States has always represented something of a paradox. As former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau memorably quipped to American reporters in 1969: "Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant: no matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."[3]

On the whole, however, Canadians have been grateful to share the North American continent with the United States.[4] Despite occasional difficulties, the two nations have always been, and remain--in almost every sense--one another's best friend. This was as true during the cauldron of the 1960s as it is today. Thus Trudeau's celebrated remark not only perfectly captures Canadian attitudes toward the United States in general; it is also a splendid metaphor for Canadian-American diplomatic and economic relations in the 1960s. In his excellent book, *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963-1968*, Greg Donaghy demonstrates that, during the decade, friction on specific issues, however important, could not weaken the overall health of the Canadian-Ameri-

can relationship. And there was certainly no shortage of friction, specifically over trade, finance, nuclear weapons, and, especially, the Vietnam War. As Donaghy states in his introduction, Canada and the United States always managed to find "ways to accommodate each other's diverging political interests without seriously impairing bilateral cooperation" (p. 4).

The dynamic of Canadian-American relations has always been heavily influenced (but not necessarily determined) by personalities at the top. But for the unusually intense animosity between Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and President John F. Kennedy, for example, Canadian-American relations in the early 1960s should have been fairly smooth. Similarly, Washington and Ottawa may not have cooperated so closely in the 1980s and early 1990s had it not been for the chumminess Prime Minister Brian Mulroney shared with Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. This general pattern makes Donaghy's main subject, the painfully awkward relationship between Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson and President Lyndon B. Johnson, all the more remarkable.

To put it mildly, Pearson and Johnson did not get along, at all. Their wildly different personalities and backgrounds often clashed violently--sometimes literally so, as was the case in the infamous April 1965 Camp David fiasco, during which Johnson grabbed Pearson by the lapels of his coat and violently shook him after Pearson publicly criticized Johnson's conduct of the war in Vietnam. Donaghy relates that at the first Washington summit between the two leaders, in January 1964, "the differences dividing the two men were evident" (p. 43). Pearson did not help matters by gossiping during dinner with Secretary of State and fellow Oxonian Dean Rusk, an inexcusable ***faux pas*** to the famously insecure Johnson. Things had not improved by the time the two leaders met again, almost exactly a year later at the LBJ Ranch in Texas. Donaghy's vivid description of the encounter is worth quoting at length:

"Dressed in a formal black suit and diplomat's homburg, Pearson was discomfited on arriving at the ranch to discover the president in a cowboy suit. A barrage of television cameras awaited the two men, whose meeting began poorly when Johnson introduced Pearson as '[British] Prime Minister [Harold] Wilson.' There was no time during the two-day meeting for the kind of leisurely, wide-ranging discussion of international developments that Pearson enjoyed. Instead, loaded into three cars, Johnson, Pearson, the 'press,' and the 'ladies' embarked on a whirlwind tour of the ranch. The president dispensed drinks liberally and swore loudly. Dinner was a hurried and informal affair; steak and catfish on the same plate. Throughout, aides and valets bustled about and telephones rang. 'General MacArthur would not have approved, nor, I suspect,' Pearson observed, 'John Kennedy.' The visit left him feeling deeply disturbed" (p. 127). It was, then, something of a miracle that Pearson and Johnson were able to work together at all. If personal relations mattered very little in getting things done, it was, as Donaghy points out, largely due to diligent efforts in both capitals to make it so.

The central thesis of ***Tolerant Allies*** is thus summed up by its title. Canadian and American leaders had frequent personality differences, and they squabbled, sometimes bitterly, over many bilateral issues. But, in the end, both Washington and Ottawa realized how much they needed one another and how valuable their partnership was. In fact, in an argument that is bound to raise many an eyebrow north of the border, Donaghy states that Washington was more often the more mature, reasonable partner. The United States "showed itself a patient and tolerant ally" (p. 3), especially in economic matters, while the U.S. government had a sophisticated understanding of Canadian pressures and imperatives and "adjusted its expectations to meet Canadian realities" (p. 13). While Pearson was usually well aware of American pressures and imperatives, the same could not be said for some of the less prudent

members of his Cabinet, such as Minister of External Affairs Paul Martin (father of the current Prime Minister) and Finance Minister Walter Gordon.

To prove his argument, Donaghy tackles the thorniest of the bilateral problems, illustrates the source of friction, and demonstrates how American and Canadian officials--and the Canadian-American relationship--survived the ordeal. Instead of weaving events together in a single narrative, Donaghy has chosen to break his overall subject into several subtopics: trade, finance, defense and nuclear weapons, recognition of Communist China, and a burgeoning Canadian cultural nationalism.

Each of these issues, difficult and intractable in themselves, were aggravated by the American war in Vietnam. The historiography of Canadian diplomacy during the conflict is basically contested between those who argue that Ottawa was complicit in, and even helped facilitate, an aggressive American war, and those who argue that Ottawa did its best to remain outside the fray and act as an intermediary to bring the warring parties to the conference table.[5] Although he does not explicitly say so, Donaghy clearly sympathizes with Canadian objectives during the war: try to mitigate and eventually contain the conflict without incurring a rupture with the United States. While settling the war was the worthier goal morally, it was not the wisest choice practically. Pressured by his own peacekeeping instincts and by an increasingly antiwar Canadian public on one side, and hemmed in by the alliance with the United States on the other, Pearson gave peace a chance and then, when it proved beyond Canada's grasp, pretty much dropped the issue entirely. After the failed Ronning missions of 1966, Pearson refused to let the Vietnam War become a source of official Canadian-American tension. "Pearson resisted popular pressure to adopt extreme positions," Donaghy writes, "and in so doing, by the end of 1966, he had largely disarmed the threat posed by the war to relations between the two North American governments" (p. 124). In a sense, this sentence captures the essence of the thesis of *Tolerant Allies*: on virtually every issue, ranging from the manufacture and export of auto parts to both countries' balance of payments difficulties to relations with China and France to Ottawa's efforts to protect Canadian culture from Americanization, the Pearson government and the Johnson administration disagreed strongly without damaging their nations'overall alliance. Often they were even able to arrive at real solutions; Donaghy correctly identifies the 1965 Autopact as the most important of these.

Donaghy, the Head of the Historical Section of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, has done a splendid job sifting through miles of archival documents, published documents, memoirs, and relevant secondary sources from both countries. Well-written, tightly argued, and impressively researched, ***Tolerant Allies*** is a model of diplomatic history. In this sense, however, the book is not well-served by its somewhat inaccurate (or at least misleading) subtitle, ***Canada and the United States, 1963-1968***. This is most emphatically a study of relations between the Canadian and American governments during the Pearson era, not about Canada and the United States in general. Most of Donaghy's evidence refers to the records of the U.S. State Department, the Canadian Department of External Affairs (as it was then called) and the papers of their diplomats. A more accurate subtitle would have been "Lester Pearson and Lyndon Johnson," or, better still, "Ottawa and Washington." This is not a criticism of "old-fashioned" diplomatic history, which may not be on the academic cutting edge these days but is still useful, relevant, and essential. But at times this reviewer was left wishing Donaghy had fulfilled the promise of his actual subtitle. He writes, for example, of Pearson being "caught" by "domestic demands for a distinctive response" to the Vietnam War but then does not illustrate what these demands were

or who was making them (p. 123). At only 179 pages of text, surely there was room in ***Tolerant Allies*** for further exploration of these important wider issues and context in Canadian-American relations.

Nonetheless, this is a small complaint that should in no way detract from the overall quality of this excellent book. If Canadians actually fear anything in their American cousins, it is their inability to sit still. This is the geopolitical and cultural activism that Albright's notion of America as the "indispensable nation" captured so well; it is a notion that her avowedly moralistic allies in the neoconservative movement expressed last year to the horror, bafflement, and fury of most Canadians. And, to their great annoyance (when they notice at all), Americans have lately re-discovered the smug and equally moralistic Canadian superiority complex that once irritated Dean Acheson, among others.[6] Thus Donaghy's story, a time when Ottawa and Washington could fail to see eye to eye about nearly everything and yet sit still for a few moments to work out their differences behind the scenes, represents something of an under-appreciated golden age in Canada's bilateral relations with the United States. Here ***Tolerant Allies*** provides support for other recent attempts, most notably Thomas Alan Schwartz's important book ***Lyndon Johnson and Europe***, to reappraise LBJ's foreign policy in a more favorable light.[7] As Donaghy shows, in 1963 "two competing visions ... seemed destined to collide," but in between the extremely low points of the Diefenbaker-Kennedy and Trudeau-Nixon battles, "Lyndon Johnson's accession to the presidency delayed this confrontation" (p. 12).

Notes

[1]. The quotes are from, respectively, Robert C. DiPrizio, ***Armed Humanitarians: U.S. Interventions from Northern Iraq to Kosovo*** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 72; and Andrew J. Bacevich, ***American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 142. For a thoughtful discussion of the continuing role of U.S. power, and how it affects America's relations with both allies and competitors, see Josef Joffe, "Defying History and Theory: The United States as the 'Last Remaining Superpower,'" in ***America Unrivalled: The Future of the Balance of Power***, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 155-180.

[2]. John W. Holmes, ***Life with Uncle: The Canadian-American Relationship*** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). The systemic strains, and above all the ambivalence, of the Canadian-American relationship is perhaps best reflected in the titles of some major works on the subject. See, for example, Charles F. Doran, ***Forgotten Partnership: U.S.-Canada Relations Today*** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); Seymour Martin Lipset, ***Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada*** (New York: Routledge, 1990); and J. L. Granatstein, ***Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism*** (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996).

[3]. Quoted in Robert Bothwell and J. L. Granatstein, ***Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 51.

[4]. See especially Robert Bothwell, ***Canada and the United States: The Politics of Partnership*** (New York: Twayne, 1992).

[5]. On the former, see Victor Levant, ***Quiet Complicity: Canadian Involvement in the Vietnam War*** (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1986). On the latter, see Douglas A. Ross, ***In the Interests of Peace: Canada and Vietnam, 1954-1973*** (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), which Donaghy rightly praises as still "the best work" on the subject (p. 204n1). For an overview, see Andrew Preston, "Balancing War and Peace: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Vietnam War, 1961-1965," ***Diplomatic History*** 27 (January 2003), pp. 73-81.

[6]. Acheson, himself the son of a Canadian immigrant, acerbically referred to Canada as the

"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God." Quoted in Robert Bothwell, "Canada's Moment: Lester Pearson, Canada, and the World," in *Pearson: The Unlikely Gladiator* ed. Norman Hillmer (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 26. Donaghy also wrote a chapter in this book: "Minding the Minister: Pearson, Martin and American Policy in Asia, 1963-1967," pp. 131-149. Donaghy's reappraisal of Lyndon Johnson's foreign policy is consistent with some of the emerging historiography that is more favorable to Johnson.

[7]. Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).