

Reflections on the State of the World — 4

American Imperialism and Canada

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

I am always astonished when Americans pointblank reject, or even feel offended at, the suggestion that theirs is an aggressive nation, which for many decades has emphatically pursued imperialistic goals. The historical facts speak for themselves, but then, the American public's education is, to put it mildly, highly selective. People may indeed not know the facts or have been so strongly socialized in the "American way"—some refer to this as the "deliberate dumbing down" of Americans*1—that they profess not to understand them.

"Our country is the best in the world, and there must be a very good reason for the government's international actions in the interest of the American people." It is this kind of blinkered thinking that has allowed successive U.S. governments to become ever more aggressive and bold in their imperialistic maneuvers overseas. As Senator Robert C. Byrd, who has served in the U.S. Congress for over fifty years, observed about President George Bush, Jr.: "No president must ever again be granted such license with our troops or our treasures." His trenchant book *Losing America* is appropriately subtitled *Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency*.^{*2} But we must remember that George Bush, Jr. is merely one in a long line of war-mongering U.S. presidents.

As Canadian politician, farmer, and activist David Orchard has shown in his vitally important book *The Fight for Canada*,^{*3} it all started long ago when in its formative years the United States decided to march on Canada in 1690 and then again in 1711. On the first occasions, the Canadians "fought like Indians" to beat off the invading forces. On the second occasion, Nature herself intervened and devastated an armada of forty-five warships ready to overcome Canadian "resistance." Ever since, the United States has been a perturbing neighbor of Canada.^{*4}

In 1755, Canada yet again had to fight for its independence. This time a years-long struggle ensued against an alliance between America and Britain—a collective might that brought Canada to its knees at least temporarily.

The longest, largest, most brutal, and most decisive American invasion of Canada, however, occurred in 1812. Only thanks to the fierce assistance of Natives and proficient British troops were Canadians able to repel the invading forces.

One would have thought that these lessons were enough to discourage Americans to make any further attempts at colonizing their neighbor to the north. Not so. Rumbblings of further invasions of Canada could predictably be heard in the U.S. Congress and other American political and commercial organizations for many decades to come. One of the more formidable American imperialist statesmen, who wanted to annex Canada if need be by force over the Alaska boundary dispute in 1903, was the twenty-sixth U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt. He served as a lieutenant colonel during the Spanish-

American war, supported the U.S.-Philippine war, and authorized the U.S. navy to support the Panamerican revolution against Columbia. We know that the Alaska settlement, with the help of Britain and a handpicked American tribunal, handed that large Canadian territory over to the United States in one fell swoop.

In the end, however, Canada's sovereignty was more seriously undermined by business interests within the country, which forged a profitable alliance with the United States. Business interests continue to govern the uneasy relationship between Canada and the United States.

Under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act, the so-called "Plan Crimson" was declassified in 1974. The plan was formulated after World War II, and contained detailed strategies for the military invasion of Canada by the United States. This nefarious plot was rendered obsolete with the growing Americanization of Canada and especially after Canada naïvely entered the so-called Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1987.

The notion of free trade between Canada and the United States, which overwhelmingly favors the latter nation, first significantly reared its head in the mid-nineteenth century. Intermittently, Canadians have valued their liberty more than commercial "reciprocity" with their southern neighbor. But the imperialist pressure from across the border has gradually undermined Canada's resistance to American commercialism.

Canada's immense natural resources have long been a strong magnetic attractor for the wildly overconsuming United States and, more recently, also for other (oil-starved) nations, which are now ransacking the tar zones of Alberta.

Many, if not most, Americans think of Canada as a backward country that ought to be part of the United States. One post master in a small U.S. village in which I lived for a few years even looked up the postage rate for Canada under the rubric of "United States," thinking that Canada was a legitimate state of America. She showed not even the slightest sign of embarrassment when I pointed out that Canada was a wholly sovereign nation. I reached over the counter and readily identified the relevant pages in the hefty postal reference book for her.

"Oh, does Canada have supermarkets and malls?" Yes, unfortunately. "Oh, isn't Canada one of the developing nations and wouldn't it benefit from a close relationship with the United States?" No and no again. To my utter astonishment, I myself have heard these and similar inane remarks and questions while residing in the United States.

Financial greed on both sides of the border, as well as political ineptitude, intrigue, and corruption progressively moved the notion of free trade along predetermined channels until the fateful day in 1987 when former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney announced in Ottawa that a free trade deal had been made with the United States.*5 He told—effectively lied to—the public that this deal would usher in a new era of prosperity for his countrymen and contained no clauses that would affect them adversely.

On closer inspection, the agreement obligates Canadians to many one-way deals clearly in America's favor. At great expense, Canadians were handed out a deceptively oversimplified synopsis of the FTA document, but for years were denied easy access to the actual full-length document, which can now be found on the Internet

(www.worldtradelaw.net/nafta/CUSFTA.pdf). Most importantly, the agreement had been signed without the mandate of the Canadian citizenry. As Orchard observed: “. . . the entire FTA is built on myths and falsehoods. . . It has tied Canada into a straitjacket and shackled it with leg irons.”*6

According to David Orchard, after the agreement had been signed, one U.S. trade representative was overheard as commenting: “The Canadians don’t understand what they’ve signed. In twenty years, they will be sucked into the U.S. economy.”*7 In the meantime, this prediction has virtually come true. Many of Canada’s businesses are owned or part-owned by Americans. Over 10,000 Canadian companies have been taken over by American corporations. The sale in 2006 to Americans of the Hudson’s Bay Company, the oldest commercial company in North America and a solid Canadian status symbol, was especially tragic. Before that the sale in 1994 to Americans of Canadian National railway was a big blow economically (especially to farmers) and psychologically (to the whole country).

All this should have signaled to Canadians that their country was being sold from under their feet. Unfortunately, as elsewhere, the public’s political will has thus far proven extraordinarily feeble in the face of persistent and insidious economic and political machinations. Some observers of the political scene even recognize a subservient colonial mentality abroad in Canada.

It ought to be emphasized that when in 1988 the FTA was ratified, the declared will of the majority of Canadians was pushed aside because of party-political infighting and an abysmal failure of the democratic process. The FTA has given American corporations virtually carte-blanche in exploiting Canada’s natural resources, notably oil, gas, water, and agricultural products. Although Canadian farmers and businesses are grumbling at the intimidations and harrassments of their American trade partners, no concerted effort has been to force the government to revoke the agreement, which would require only a six-months period of exit.

From another perspective, even though the FTA has shackled Canada, perhaps Canadians can count themselves lucky not to have been subjected to actual military invasion or the serious threat of it as has been the case in other of America’s “foreign interests,” such as Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico (now a “semiautonomous territory” of the United States), Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Since its founding days, the United States has used military force in well over 200 international conflicts to secure its interests. Every single generation of Canadians has lived with the possibility of a U.S. invasion. How many Americans are aware of this fact or are concerned about its implications?

Historically speaking, the one good thing about empires is that they don’t last. The spirit of independence predictably and periodically rears its head in vassal states and colonies, which weakens the empire. Witness Sumer, Rome, Greece, China, Nazi Germany, Japan, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. More than any other empire, the United States has achieved the White House’s ambition of so-called “full spectrum dominance.”

The question remains: When will the American empire crumble? Perhaps its worldwide imperial web has already started to unravel. And the trigger may not even be political or

military overextension but Nature, which is in a state of collapse and which has scant resources left to be exploited in order to sustain a lifestyle of gross overconsumption. If true, history would merely be repeating itself.*8

Notes

1. Charlotte Thompson Iserbyt, *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America* (Dresden, Maine: 3D Research Company, 1999).
2. Robert C. Byrd, *Losing America: Confronting a Reckless and Arrogant Presidency* (New York: Norton & Co., 2004).
3. David Orchard, *The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism* (Westmount, Quebec: Robert Davies Multimedia Publishing, repr. 2002). See also the documentary *Hoodwinked: The Myth of Free Trade* (Artistic Productions Ltd., 2006) in which David Orchard expresses his views along with former Canadian finance minister John Turner and others.
4. See Linda McQuaig, *Holding the Bully's Coat: Canada and the U.S. Empire* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007).
5. See Stevie Cameron, *On the Take: Crime, Corruption and Greed in the Mulroney Years* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1994); John Sawatsky, *Mulroney: The Politics of Ambition* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992); and George Bowering, *Egotists and Autocrats* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1999).
6. David Orchard, op. cit., pp. 197 and 198.
7. David Orchard, op. cit., p. 188.
8. See Norman Myers, *The New Atlas of Planet Management* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Copyright ©2008 by Georg Feuerstein. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in any form requires prior permission from Traditional Yoga Studies.