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our foreign relations. The North American environment is what really matters to us most. But it is unrewarding to focus our rhetorical attention on what in fact is a composite of vast impersonal forces. These remind us, after all, of our incapacities, of the limits of our freedom of action. So we leave the maintenance of the essentials to our mechanics – which in government means our large cadre of bureaucratically scattered and often disconnected officials – while our politicians attempt from time to time to cover the process over by sermonizing in ways that are at once self-serving and irrelevant to what is really happening on the ground. In short we lay down cosmetic claims to superior virtue, while concentrating our most expert minds on what it really takes to fill our pocket books.

It is in this very particular sense that I do not regard our conduct of Canadian-American relations as a 'problem'. Certainly it raises difficulties, and clearly the difficulties themselves are enveloped in 'politics.' They pose challenges for policy-makers. But in the end they are more practical than ideational, and their persistence over time draws our attention to the fact that they are a normal part of doing business in the North American context. Those who must deal with them understand that they are about interests – direct, immediate, and often vital. It is in the nature of imperatives that they have their own logic, and the conduct of Canada's bilateral relations with the United States is ultimately about the management of imperatives. It is the game that Presbyterians know best.



My real concern (in the present context, at least) thus lies elsewhere, and more particularly with our approach to dealing with politico-security challenges overseas, where the game is very different. In the first place, our behaviour there is not much driven by imperatives, although these may make flash appearances here and there in fields of transnational endeavour that have major 'functional' significance for Canada – trade, for example, or the law of the sea, or the control of disease, or (more tenuously, it would appear) the nurturing of the environment. But in the politico-security area, the truth of the matter is that we do not HAVE to do anything very much at all. The enterprises we undertake are elective – 'voluntarist.' That being so, we can much more easily pretend in our operations overseas than in contexts closer to home that our performance is a function, not of our interests, but of our nature, our culture, our values. Even where we *do* have