

# Trudeau

## CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY



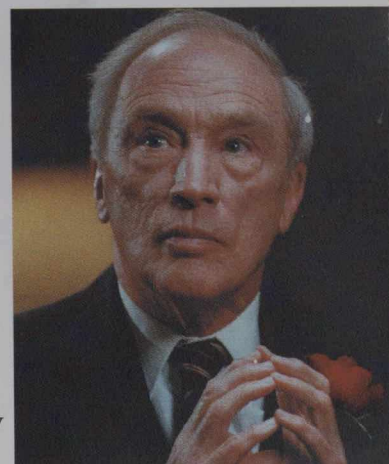
Prime Minister Trudeau and Cuban President Fidel Castro at a Havana housing project, January 27, 1976



Prime Minister Trudeau performing his famous pirouette during a May 7, 1977, reception at Buckingham Palace in London, England



Canada, while remaining in NATO, now contributed less per capita than any other member country.



Pierre Trudeau, November 8, 1993

photos: CANAPRESS

### RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

Canada-U.S. relations were troubled throughout the Trudeau era. From the U.S. perspective, the sources of friction included Canada's apparent gradual exit from NATO and its conciliatory approach to Cold War adversaries.

In Latin America, Canadian foreign policy diverged sharply from that of Washington in relation to U.S. client states, such as Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala.

In the Caribbean, Canada differed from the United States in maintaining diplomatic and trade ties with Cuba. In the same region, Canada was openly critical of U.S. military action against the island nation of Grenada after the murder of the incumbent prime minister in an attempted coup.

In economic and trade relations, disagreement focussed on Canadian measures (never very effective) to control foreign investment, Canada's imposition of energy export taxes, complaints about trans-border air pollution originating in the United States, and measures to protect Canadian cultural industries.

Despite the strains, the Canada-U.S. relationship remained intact. However, two incidents in the early 1970s demonstrated Canadian vulnerability vis-à-vis its neighbour. In 1971, the Nixon administration sought to right its balance of trade problems by slapping a surcharge on imports, including from Canada.

As a result of the uncertainties created by the US actions, the Trudeau government adopted a policy known as the "Third Option"—a foreign policy under which Canada aimed to reduce its vulnerability to the United States by increasing its trade with other regions. Trade agreements were negotiated with Japan and Europe, but despite them Canada remained as closely tied to the United States as ever.

### THE PEACE INITIATIVE

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Trudeau became increasingly uneasy about heightened Cold War tensions. He was particularly critical of the Carter administration's hostile response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In 1983, Soviet fighter jets shot down a Korean airliner that had strayed into Soviet airspace, and President Reagan characterized the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." Trudeau became convinced that the political situation was close to spinning out of control and that a superpower confrontation was dangerously near. In fact, Soviet documents made available in the post-communist era confirm that the government headed by the ailing Yuri Andropov suspected the United States of actively planning an attack.

With his own retirement looming, Trudeau undertook a personal effort to save the peace: he visited major capitals on both sides of the Cold War divide, and proposed a package of measures to reduce tension. The response was irritation in Washington, polite disinterest in Moscow and Beijing; and in the end Trudeau achieved no concrete results. But the confrontation eased with the death of Andropov, diminished more with the rapprochement initiated by Gorbachev, and still more with the establishment of democratic government in Russia.

When Trudeau died, 16 years had elapsed since he left public office. In that time, new developments have utterly transformed the international scene: the end of the Cold War, the collapse of international communism, eruptions of ethnic conflict in Europe, free trade with the United States, the emergence of China as an economic superpower, and more. With the wisdom of hindsight, these developments may be seen as validating some of Trudeau's foreign policy approaches while calling others into doubt. What remains unchallenged are Trudeau's readiness to question widely held assumptions, his dedication to an independent foreign policy for Canada, and his commitment to peace. ●