

From middle to foremost power

Defining a new place for Canada in the hierarchy of world power

By James Eayrs

It is the argument of this essay that the term "middle power" no longer does justice to Canada's role in world affairs. Canada has become instead a "foremost power" — foremost in the dictionary definition of "most notable or prominent". I hope to show that this assertion is no chauvinistic trumpery, no Laurier-like extravaganza ("the twenty-first century belongs to Canada"), but rather a realistic assessment of Canadian capabilities in a world where the substance, and hence the distribution, of power have undergone swift and radical change.

"Power" is the master-concept of politics. As life is to biology, space to astronomy, deity to theology, so is power to relations among individuals, groups and nations. Its very centrality in its field has caused theorists to take power for granted, to take power as given. But in politics nothing should be taken for granted, nothing taken as given.

Let us review, therefore, the properties of power, of which three are basic. Power is *pervasive*; power is *elusive*; and power is *relative*. (Never dismiss platitudes: they often express essential truths.)

Pervasiveness of power

What prose was for M. Jourdain ("Gracious me! For the last 40 years I have been speaking prose without knowing it."), power is for all of us. We may know power as its manipulators, we may know it as its victims, we may, like Jourdain, not know we know. But power is pervasive in our lives. Power is the ecology of politics. To talk of "power politics" is otiose, for there is no other kind.

Resistance to the notion of the pervasiveness of power is as pervasive as power itself. Saints, mystics, gurus of the hour or of the ages are often proclaimed by themselves and their disciples to be beyond the power principle, outside the power nexus.

Gandhi is widely cited as an example of a profoundly significant figure who refused to play the power game. Certainly the "half-naked, seditious fakir" (as

Churchill once described him) appeared to dwell in a kind of power counter-culture — at loggerheads with power, at the antipodes from power. Certainly the saintly figure of the Mahatma in its ascetic's garb seemed even to his fellow Indians on first meeting to be (in Pandit Nehru's words) "very distant and different and unpolitical". How much more so must it have seemed to those worldly British politicians who — their exasperation rising as he remained beyond reach of the sort of argument to which politicians normally respond — tried to negotiate with him about the future of his country!

Gandhi's *satyagraha* — "clinging to truth" — demanded everything that power normally abhors. The shunning of duplicity. The turning of one's cheek. The avoiding of force even in the presence of a weaker adversary. No — the avoiding of force *especially* in the presence of a weaker adversary. And in the presence of a stronger? "I will come out into the open, and let the pilot see I have not a trace of evil against him [*sic*]". Such was Gandhi's bomber-defence system.

The strategy invites at worst derision, at best the comment made by Henry Kissinger about the only kind of pacifist he has the time of day for — "those who bear the consequences of non-violence to the end". "But," Kissinger adds, "even to them I will talk willingly merely to tell them that they will be crushed by the will of those that are strong, and that their pacifism can lead to nothing but horrible suffering."

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