

Oh Canada, We (used to) Stand on Guard for Thee

by [Larry McCloskey](#) (March 2025)



Parliament Hill, Overlooking the Rideau Canal (Robert Pilot, 20th C)

On September 10, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany, this the first time Canada had done so without being compelled by the belligerent. That same day, my Uncle Tom enlisted in the navy, followed by my other uncle, Ernest, on the 22nd, and my Dad, Leonard, on September 25th.

Dad, the youngest, was just 18, had grown up in deprivation of

the depression, and without hesitation he committed to the great unknown of war. Pre-war, depression-dad had weighed 120 pounds; sailer-dad weighed a robust and ripped 150 pounds. The transformation is not difficult to understand. During the depression dad hadn't enough to eat; in the navy he ate like a metaphoric drunken sailor.

Objectively, dad had exited the hell of the depression for the hell of war, but he and his brothers chose to interpret war-time service as both adventure and personal duty. Early on, in photo after photo on board his ship or in Halifax—each with a careful cursive explanation—dad provides details and conveys a strong impression of being in his element. Three square meals and purpose will do that.

Dad was tough and stoic by nature, but something else happened to complete the hellish transformation of his early years. Dad loved to experience a storm at sea while on a convoy ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean. On one particularly dark and stormy night, he goes outside, is thrown into a metal railing and breaks several vertebrae of his back. It is literally a very bad break, and he is rushed to the Montreal Neurological Institute to be operated on by renowned neurosurgeon surgeon, Dr. Wilder Penfield. Surgeries, in the plural, involved spinal fusion which was difficult and still primitive, leaving dad with restrictive neck and back movement as well as a lifetime of pain. Yet—and certainly not required by the navy—after one year in rehabilitation, Dad chose to return to active duty, having trained and qualified as a signalman. It was one of the few navy roles he could perform with a serious disability. He embraced the duty and never forgave himself for the sense of adventure that caused his accident.

It is well documented and a source of Canadian pride that Canada punched above its weight during the entire Second World War. And though incredible by way of comparison with current military capacity, in 1945 Canada had the 4th largest navy in the world.

The willingness to punch upward continued after the war, for a time. In 1956, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson, won support to send a United Nations Emergency Force to expedite the Suez crisis and prevent potential use of atomic weapons (the Soviet Union threatened Britain, France, and Israel). An armed, impartial peace-keeping force of over 6000 soldiers from eleven countries was inserted between Israeli and Egyptian forces. More impressive than the numbers of soldiers or contributing countries, was the United Nations' effective peace keeping role in the prevention of war. Never has this UN mission been realized in equal measure in its subsequent 70 year history. Still, Pearson proved it could be done. In 1957, Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize. Six years later, Pearson, a Liberal, became the Canadian Prime Minister.

Fast forward to cataclysmic Liberal Party hegemony of the past decade. Health care, work productivity (best indicator of economic health), anemic energy production, government induced inflation, neglect of military, spiralling housing prices, add up to a country in decline. Essentials required for people to thrive have been sacrificed for vague gains and fraudulent promises on climate change, globalist and DEI aspirations without outcomes; in short, the unreality of wokeness versus the reality of fundamental governing. Worse, as objectively measured, economic sacrifices have not produced demonstrable benefit on any progressive files. Much of the progressive agenda has been enacted against Canadian majority views, with a metaphorical wagging finger from our grating, faux-feminist, Prime Minister's relentless blame and shame tactics.

Case in point, we are berated that our history—which provided value and context five minutes ago—is actually racist and wrong, and that our best efforts in the present are filled with micro- aggressions we never dreamed of. Further, progressive thinking unambiguously divides the world between oppressors and the oppressed as determined by immutable

characteristics that nullify individual action and merit. It is the antithesis of Martin Luther King— we are not the content of character; rather we cannot escape the content of external attributes and tribal affiliation. Which, even if true, leads to lethargy and indifference.

The sense of belonging and pride of country that is essential to civic thriving has been eroded by progressive grandstanding enacted against trusting Canadians. For example, December, 2024, Shachi Kurt, president of the Angus Reid Institute: “Back in 2016, the portrait of Canada that came out of ARI’s research was not about hockey, or Tim Hortons or even health care. It was about a shared faith that you could have the opportunity, the economic ability, to have a good life.” That sense of shared faith and pride in Canada has dropped most precipitously for the entire duration of Trudeau’s years as Canadian PM. Those respondents who said they had a ‘deep attachment’ and were ‘very proud’ to be Canadian was 78% in 1985, 52% in 2016 (one year after Trudeau became PM), and most astonishingly, dropping to an all-time low of 34% in 2024.

When Trudeau began as Prime Minister, he claimed Canada to be the world’s first post-nationalist state (one of many utterances that exposed his [allegiance to globalist World Economic Forum](#) ideals over Canadian shared values). Trudeau claimed, “There is no core identity, mainstream in Canada.” Trudeau has used this globalist absurdity to assert his woke agenda as examples of, “Canadian values.” Logic dictates that one cannot have values without a core, but to Trudeau it was an opportunity to claim his dysfunctional ideology as distinctly Canadian values. Trudeau’s every utterance for the past decade has been banal pablum, and he qualifies as the undisputed worst Prime Minister in Canadian history.

And yet even though he is done as Prime Minister, he is not done wrecking havoc. As Canadians wake to woke—Rip Van Winkle seems fitting comparison—lame duck Trudeau is determined to

ratchet worst into worse. Although he resigned as Prime Minister, Trudeau has prorogued parliament to ensure his nightmarish legacy continue as long as possible. During a recent speech for Black History Month, Trudeau once again chided Canadians for being racist, giving him a responsibility to, "right wrongs." (It is worth noting Canadians are willing to right wrongs wherever they exist, but Trudeau's accusations are always prelude to blame and shame without content). No doubt in consequence of polls showing that Canadians have had it with the exiting PM and his uber-progressive Liberal party, Trudeau promises to be "ruthless," as he exits.

Without knowing the full extent of his intentions to be ruthless, it is worth noting that Trudeau gifted 85 Senators to life-time appointments during his tenure, with another ten appointments to be filled. A reasonable person, and the vast majority of Canadians expected Trudeau's resignation to result in an immediate election, with the remaining ten Senate appointments to be made by the new Prime Minister. Lane-duck crony appointments speak of ruthlessness borne of entitlement and resentment.

Regrettably, Mark Carney, Liberal leadership front-runner and WEF adherent, made a statement that his candidacy will combat the "war on woke" and double down on "inclusive" Canadian values. Woke and WEF ideologues are not values, certainly not Canadian values, and as an elite far removed from the actual expression of Canadian values, Carney is the last person to represent us fairly. To be clear, the EDI legacy as ideologically played out for the past decade is unequal in the name of equity, lacks diversity (especially diversity of opinion), and excludes in the name of inclusion. Left to their own devices, Canadians are overwhelmingly fair-minded and inviting.

Now, let's consider our neighbours to the south. At the beginning of the Second World War, long after Canada had declared war and my dad and uncles had enlisted, Americans

were decidedly isolationist, and FDR was determined –much to Churchill’s chagrin–that no American soldier was ever going to be sent to Europe. Lend-lease was as much the allies could hope for.

It is for this reason–Churchill later confirmed–December 7, 1941, to be the best day of his life. Churchill didn’t celebrate the death of 2,403 Americans when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour, but he knew that it would wake the sleeping giant out of its political slumber. Churchill knew that Britain’s desperate situation against air raids and pending Nazi invasion, would not end in defeat. Meanwhile, American resolve was rapid and transformational. A Gallop poll taken between December 10th and 17th, 1941, showed a 97% approval from the United States to declare war on Japan. Another Gallop poll, December 10th (one day before Germany declared war on the United States) showed a 90% approval for declaring war on Germany.

Now fully awake, the US assembled its armed forces and proceeded to manufacture military arms in quantities unprecedented in military history. A comparison of Allies versus Axis wartime production, once the United States became the backbone of the alliance, shows that the Axis could never have won the war: Ships, Allies 54,931, Axis, 1,670; Tanks, Allies 4,358,650, Axis, 670,288; Artillery, 6,792,696, Axis, 1,363,490. An equal disparity exists in comparison of fuel and essential materials for war, but perhaps the best single comparison exists in the dollar comparison: Allies \$97,707,908,723, Axis, \$10,268,201,776.

It is no exaggeration to say that at the end of the Second World War, the United States was not just the most powerful country in the world, nor even the most powerful country that had ever existed; indeed it was more powerful than all countries combined. War had economically defeated the victors as well as the belligerents, but not the United States (same for Canada to a lesser extent). And what did the United States

do with all that power? They rebuilt countries and economies, especially the Axis belligerents, Germany and Japan. And, most notably, they allowed the Soviet Union (sympathy for their 20 million dead provides compassionate context but does not explain) to take over Eastern Europe, and, most grievous, to become a nuclear power. Why, is an interesting question for which I've never found satisfactory answer.

Though they did not become an imperial power, many accuse Americans of economic imperialism. But success in a capitalist, democratic free world is not imperialism. Critics of American success seem invariably addicted to American culture, without seeing any contradiction. I'm often struck by this irony when travelling to great cities revered for culture. However authentic and spectacular Rome's Colosseum, Athen's Acropolis, or Paris' Eiffel Tower, American music and culture predominates in these and most places, by choice. American cultural hegemony is a ubiquitous weirdness that breeds—whether fair or not—both admiration and resentment.

Bashing American success—surely indicative of feelings of inferiority—is a popular sport worldwide. Canada, is no exception, and may be one of the most enthusiastic practitioners. Canadians are nice and polite, while Americans are loud and prone to bullying. Especially, President Trump. It seems ironic that while Trudeau passively decimates Canadians' sense of pride and belonging, the perceived threat of Trump, fills us with combative resolve.

If only we reacted with fire in the belly whenever sovereignty is threatened. We have tolerated every post-nationalist elitist lie, focusing on inflated false problems and ignoring real problems unless they intrude into our cold corner of the world. It is a complacency that is unworthy of us—that is, the us of past decades that it took the brash histrionics of the present President to light a fire under. As in Hemingway's quote about going bankrupt, Canadian devolution was, "gradually, then suddenly." We passively allowed the United

States to blanket us in their security, often without bothering to contribute or take responsibility for our own security. We allowed entropy to pervade our military might, our will, the fabric of our sovereignty. We became indignant at what Americans do, even as we become soft in doing little. We are as distant from the post-war status of having the 4th largest navy in the world as is possible. We are more silent than equal partner in NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command). It is no exaggeration to say that we exist at the behest of the Americans. Yes, an uncomfortable thought, but if not for American military presence does anyone really think Russia and China would have allowed for our existence? Same uncomfortable thought and same answer today.

None of this is defence of American actions, rather it is criticism of Canadian inaction. As a result of poor leadership and political passivity, Canadians may not fully understand that we have relinquished core elements of sovereignty to the United States. We take as our due all the advantages of military protection from, and proximity to, the most powerful country and largest economy in the world.

And now, Trump makes unreasonable tariff demands and we feel togetherness in what, pride, indignation? We think how dare that president, those Americans! We are a sovereign country and never want to become an American state. Agreed. But sovereignty is forged and sustained by sacrifice, vigilance and resolve. Today, we are weak and vulnerable, because in recent decades we chose to be.

Trump is being unfair to Canada, and we should not be treated the same as Mexico. Still, a correct course of action must include looking inward to where our leaders have led us. The Bank of Canada estimates 25% American tariffs will cost between 3.4 and 4.2% of GDP. Serious stuff, and yet the Bank further estimates the on-going, fully accepted and ubiquitous cost of interprovincial Canadian trade barriers to be about the same percentage!

Here is another example of Canadian passivity leading to self-inflicted harm (defined as huge missed opportunity for prosperity). Two years ago, Trudeau turned down both German Chancellor Olaf Schulz's, and Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's plea for game-changing, long term contracts to buy natural gas. These deals would have ensured pipelines are built, billions in revenue are earned, and—particularly significant in the current crisis—new non-American markets are opened for meaningful economic diversity. Trudeau said no—justified by his crusade against fossil fuels— even though LNG is the cleanest, lowest emitting of fossil fuels.

Perhaps the biggest surprise/opportunity in response to Trump comes from Quebec. Quebec killed a LNG pipeline in 2021, for environmental reasons, and yet on February 5, 2025, environment minister, Benoit Charette agreed to reconsider. Quebec has a long history of consistently acting in its own interests over national interests. Quebec's willingness to reconsider remains for provincial/self interest, but represents a modicum of possibility for a federal strategic response to Trump.

As bombastic as he may be, Trump knows what he is doing. He is a disrupter, and what his disruption has exposed could become a Canadian unifying opportunity. We have endured a decade of the petulant child prime minister, and it is time for us to channel the grown-ups of past generations. Building for strength through national maturation can ensure we are never vulnerable again. Spitting in Trumps' eye in the absence of a nation building plan will only hasten our devolution. The fact is, for all his lack of Canadian niceness, much of what Trump is after is in our own self-interest. Not pursuing self-interest because of an emotional desire to stick it to Trump is our worst response. My argument is not about Trump; rather it is a call for Canadian leadership to enact a dispassionate, self-interested plan that anticipates and reacts appropriately to crisis and opportunity, thereby safeguarding sovereignty.

A Self-Interested and Cooperative Response to American Concerns:

1. As Victor Davis Hansen documents in *The Dying Citizen*, a country does not have sovereignty unless it controls its borders. The Democrats allowed entry into the United States—and it was deliberate since no amount of incompetence can account for such a number—over 10 million migrants who were assumed would become future Democrat voters. China manufacturers fentanyl which has entered the United States primarily through Mexico. Over 75,000 American deaths each year have been the direct result. But with Trump's determination to seal the border and deport migrants, there is no doubt migrants and drug smugglers are looking north to one of the most porous borders in the world. I have heard Canadians comment that fentanyl is a uniquely American problem. Even if it is, we should help, but it is not. It is a North American problem that, and again in Canada's self-interest, we should do whatever we can to solve.
2. Canada's 4th largest Navy in the world status is a distant, hardly to be believed, memory of a different people at a different time. Despite stated intentions to do otherwise, Canada commits only 1.3% of GDP to military, far below our NATO minimal obligation of 2%. The Americans spend 3.45% of GDP, a figure that will likely go up under the Trump administration. The American military budget is almost 40% of world military spending, is more than the next nine countries combined. The American military budget is commitment; Canada's military budget is lack thereof.

Canada should immediately commit to a minimum of 2%, but given our large size, small population and need to reassert sovereignty, we would be wise to spend much more. On this issue, Canada has a unique opportunity to take a leadership role— and yes, even as compared to the mighty Americans. Canada has the longest coastline in the world by far— 202,080 kilometres, fully twice as long as Norway, sitting at second place. The United States is 9th on the list at a paltry 19,924 kilometers, less than one tenth of Canada's shoreline. There has been a growing awareness of the need to provide surveillance of our northern shorelines, especially since Russia and China have sinister interest in what we neglect. We could direct much of military spending into specializing in northern surveillance, both the expertise and equipment needed. In doing so—channeling our post-Second World War accomplishments—we could lend our emerging expertise, service personnel and equipment to the United States to help with surveillance of their Northern coastal waters. These moves, based on a deliberate national commitment, would cement a mutually cooperative relationship based on strength. And it would be satisfying for Canadians to lead by example rather than, once again, suffer the indignity of being dragged kicking and screaming just to meet minimal standards. The false sense of superiority that our elites cultivate as “peacekeepers,” makes us look irrelevant and weak in a world that respects the relevance of deterrence.

3. Canada should also take a proactive role initiating a coordinated, mutually beneficial North American energy strategy. Together, Canada and the United States, can exceed energy independence and make billions selling natural gas and oil to markets in Europe and Asia. Canada needs pipelines south, east and west, and given inertia of recent decades, the political malaise will

require a deliberate national commitment and strategy. This commitment –which significantly, Canadians really want–requires leadership to assert federal authority over provincial objections. Many Canadians would be surprised to know that pipelines are fully within federal jurisdiction, regulated by the Canada Energy Regulator (CER). Provinces cannot say no, and it is only a lack of political will that is preventing Canada from realizing its greatest economic advantage. The geopolitical imperative for North American energy independence is incalculable.

Trump and his MAGA motto inspires much opposition, especially in Canada. But indignation does not help Canada. Feelings about Trump are irrelevant to the issues pleading for our attention and are a distraction from our extreme need to engage in the world and prepare, as is the nature of deterrence throughout history (i.e. “If you want peace, prepare for war”). I am not arguing for bended knee to Trump; rather I am arguing that we examine where in Trump’s diatribe our self-interest lies, and the convenient truth may be, on the issues of the border, military and energy, Canadian and American self-interest actually align with surprising mutual interest. Standing up to Trump requires we stand with Trump—or more palatably for some, with our American neighbours—when common sense exposes common interest. That way, when our interests do not align, we can fully assert our independence, taking full responsibility and garnishing national and international respect. Knowing the difference between opportunity for partnership and need to be independent is important. Our sovereignty may depend on it.

The Canada we inherited from the greatest generation knew what was not protected would be taken, what was not appreciated would be lost. The best, most prudent and audacious response to the present crisis is to prepare for military, border and

energy requirements as if our lives depended on it. We need to exit complacency and indignation for gratitude and duty in the pursuit of national goals that reassert our shared national identity.

*Oh Canada, we stood on guard for thee,
Oh Canada, we will stand on guard for thee, again
Oh Canada, we stand on guard for thee.*

[Table of Contents](#)

Larry McCloskey has had eight books published, six young adult as well as two recent non-fiction books. *Lament for Spilt Porter* and *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (2018 & 2020 respectively) won national Word Guild awards. *Inarticulate* won best Canadian manuscript in 2020 and recently won a second Word Guild Award as a published work. He recently retired as Director of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University. Since then, he has written a satirical novel entitled *The University of Lost Causes* (Castle Quay Books, June, 2024), and has qualified as a Social Work Psychotherapist. He lives in Canada with his three daughters, two dogs, and last, but far from least, one wife. His website is larrymccloskeywriter.com.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)