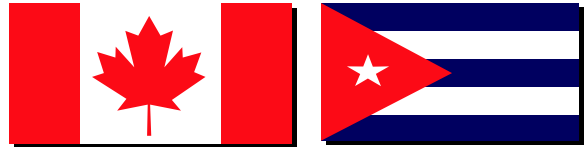


Canada and Cuba



After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and the rise to power of Fidel Castro, relations between Cuba and the United States began to deteriorate. Castro's government moved against American economic interests in Cuba, in particular the sugar mills that provided the country's main source of export earnings. Castro and his supporters believed that the United States had been exploiting Cuba economically, and that it had supported the corrupt dictatorship the revolution had overthrown. When the Castro government nationalized (put under government control) important American assets in Cuba, the United States responded by imposing an economic blockade and trade sanctions. The situation became even further aggravated when a group of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, aided by the United States, attempted an invasion of Cuba in April 1961 with the goal of overthrowing the revolutionary government. After his forces repelled this invasion, Castro announced that he was allying his country with the Soviet Union and adopting a communist political and economic system. Since this occurred during the height of the Cold War, a period of extreme tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, the American government from that time on considered the Castro regime in Cuba to be its enemy.

One of the first diplomatic steps the United States took to isolate Cuba was to demand its expulsion from the Organization of American States, a body whose membership included most of the countries in North and South America except Canada at that time. It also used considerable pressure to persuade all the nations of the Western Hemisphere to withdraw their ambassadors from Cuba, and stop trading with it. Most of the South and Central American states complied with the U.S. request, but two countries did not. They were Mexico and Canada. Mexico had long pursued a foreign policy independent of the United States, and its government had close relations with Cuba that it was unwilling to break. For its part, the Canadian government, then led by Conservative Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, was sympathetic to the American position on Cuba and did not support the communist ideology of the Castro regime. However, it did not want to suspend its economic and trade ties with Cuba, nor was it willing to sever diplomatic relations. Consequently, Canada refused to endorse the American policy towards Cuba, and has continued to maintain economic and diplomatic ties to that country ever since.

In the decades since the Cuban Revolution, the United States government has made various attempts to destabilize or overthrow the Castro regime, none of them successful. Despite the fall of the communist states to which Cuba was once allied, and which provided it with much-needed trade and economic assistance, Fidel Castro remains in power. In the 1990s, the American government tightened its economic blockade against Cuba, and even threatened to impose sanctions on any country that continued to trade with it. Despite this, a number of Canadian companies have made substantial investments in the Cuban economy, and thousands of Canadians visit the country every year as tourists. The Canadian government has frequently criticized the Castro regime for its pattern of human-rights violations, unwillingness to democratize its political system, and other issues. Nonetheless, it has consistently held the view that a constructive engagement with Cuba is a policy better designed to promote positive change in that country and foster greater peace and understanding in the Caribbean and Latin American regions of the hemisphere.

Canada and Sudan



The vast African country of Sudan has been the scene of a violent civil war for the last four decades. Its government, based in the northern capital of Khartoum, is under the control of the Muslim majority, which is seeking to impose its rule over the Christian and animist minorities who live in the southern regions. During this brutal conflict, thousands of people have lost their lives, either as a result of military actions or starvation, resulting from disastrous droughts and the government's deliberate withholding of humanitarian aid to them. Slavery flourishes in this country, and international efforts to end this abominable practice have so far achieved little. It has been alleged that forces close to the government use slavery as a means of enriching themselves and terrorizing the people of the south.

Many countries, including Canada, have voiced their concerns to the Sudanese government about its conduct of the war, its refusal to grant political rights to the southern people, and its toleration of slavery in its territory. At the same time, two Canadian-based oil companies, Talisman Energy Inc. and Fosters Resources Ltd., have made substantial investments in Sudan in order to explore and eventually exploit the country's vast potential petroleum reserves. In 1998, Talisman acquired a 25-per-cent stake in Sudan's Greater Nile oil project, which it inherited from the giant American petroleum company Chevron Corp. In 2000, Fosters secured a concession from the Sudanese government granting it the right to explore oil reserves south of Khartoum. In order to obtain such rights to proceed with their economic activities, companies like Talisman and Fosters have been required to pay large amounts of money to the government. Critics of these companies charge that such financial support only helps the government to prosecute its war against the people of the south.

In Canada, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized companies like Talisman and Fosters for continuing to do business in Sudan. Church and human rights organizations point to the terrible record of the Sudanese government in respecting basic human rights and its toleration of slavery as examples of the need to use economic pressure to help end the civil war and improve the living conditions of the people of Sudan. The Canadian government has indicated that while it does not approve of the companies' financial support for the Sudanese government, it is reluctant to order them to halt their economic activities there. Instead, it asks Talisman and Fosters to use their leverage with the Sudanese government to persuade it to change its policies. The companies themselves deny that their involvement in Sudan's resource-industry development has any connection to the civil war, slavery, or any other political or military problem the country faces. Instead, company officials strongly claim that their activities in Sudan will not only profit them, but also help the Sudanese people develop their economy, providing much-needed employment, income, development, and the chance to build schools, health-care facilities, and other social institutions.

Canada and the Kyoto Protocol on Greenhouse Gas Emissions



Climate change, in particular global warming, is a global problem that is becoming a matter of great international concern. Greenhouse gases, or GHGs, can form as a result of natural biological process on the earth, but human activities greatly increase their production. Most of the things people do now, such as driving cars, heating and cooling homes and buildings, powering industrial facilities, and using electricity, consume large amounts of energy. When the sun's radiation enters the earth's atmosphere, the GHGs these activities produce act like the glass surrounding a greenhouse to prevent the heat from the earth from dissipating into space. Most scientists are now convinced that there is a direct link between rising concentrations of GHGs in the earth's atmosphere, in particular carbon dioxide (CO₂), global warming, and the rise of extreme weather like floods, droughts, and hurricanes. As the process of global warming continues, Canadians can expect their climate to become warmer and drier. This will have a profound impact on such industries as farming, fishing, and forestry. For other countries, the results could be even more dramatic. Some low-lying regions of the world could see their coasts disappear as sea levels rise as a result of the melting of polar ice.

Responding to this environmental crisis, a number of countries realized that immediate action was required to slow down if not halt global warming. In 1997, representatives of more than 160 nations met at Kyoto, Japan, and signed an agreement committing them to a phased reduction of GHG emissions. This agreement, including the target dates and options available for countries to reach them, is known as the Kyoto Protocol. For Canada, the target is to reduce its total GHG emissions to 6 per cent below their 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. This target is similar to the Canada's main trading partners have accepted. For it to become legally binding, the Kyoto Protocol must be ratified (endorsed) by at least 55 countries responsible for 55 per cent of global GHG emissions.

Since 1997, the countries that endorsed the Kyoto Protocol have met annually in an effort to reach further agreement on how its terms are to be implemented and its targets reached. The protocol suffered a major setback when the newly elected United States President, George W. Bush, announced that his country would no longer adhere to it. Meetings in 2000 and 2001 resulted in no breakthroughs, as the United States maintained its position that implementing its emissions reductions by the target dates would pose a serious threat to its industries and economy. In Canada, the provincial government of Alberta also voiced concerns that the emissions reductions this country was expected to make might impact negatively on the important oil and gas industry there. Despite the opposition, the Kyoto Protocol has met from various countries and economic interests, Canada is working with both industrialized and developing countries to find a way to secure widespread compliance with its terms while at the same time not causing undue disruptions to the economy and global trade.



Canada and the Conflict in the Middle East

The Middle East has been a serious global conflict zone for the past five decades. In 1948, the British government ceded its mandate over Palestine and the United Nations introduced a plan for the partition (division) of the territory into two states – one for the area’s Arab population, and the other to be the homeland of the Jewish people, many of whom had fled persecution in Europe during the Nazi Holocaust of World War II. The plan was not accepted, and the region was plunged into the first of a series of wars that have led to considerable bloodshed ever since. In 1956, following the Suez Crisis, the Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations, Lester B. Pearson, proposed the creation of a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), a peacekeeping military unit composed of troops from a number of U.N. member states. This force was to be dispatched to the Middle East in order to supervise a cease-fire between Israel and its main Arab opponent in the region, Egypt.

Despite the presence of U.N. peacekeepers, there were major wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours in 1967 and 1973. During this period, the Palestinians living inside Israel and the territories it had taken as a result of its victories in the 1956 and 1967 wars, along with others who had fled to refugee camps in neighbouring Arab states, began to organize a movement for their independence and the restoration of the lands they had lost to Israel. Along with most Western countries, Canada tended to favour Israel in its ongoing conflict with its Arab neighbours and the Palestinians. It was especially critical of some Palestinian groups that resorted to terrorist violence in order to press their claims for a homeland for their people. But during the late 1980s a massive uprising of Palestinians in Israeli-occupied territory, known as the “intifada,” led to a rethinking of the conflict in many countries, including Israel’s major ally, the United States. Negotiations took place between Israel and the Palestinians, leading to an agreement signed at Oslo, Norway, in 1993. Israel agreed to return some of the lands it had occupied so that the Palestinians could have their own state, in return for receiving recognition from the Palestinians and other Arab nations, and a commitment that its security and borders would be guaranteed.

Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, the situation in the Middle East has deteriorated seriously. Canada has continued to pursue an even-handed approach to the conflict, showing sympathy with the points of view of both parties, and urging each to scale down the level of violence and resume serious negotiations. It has recognized the right of the Palestinians to have their own independent state, while at the same time acknowledging the security concerns of Israel, and insisting that they be seriously addressed.

Canada and South Africa



For many years, South Africa was an international outcast. This was because its white minority controlled the government and imposed a strict policy of racial discrimination known as “apartheid.” The country’s non-white majority had no political rights, could only live in certain areas, and was not permitted the same educational or employment opportunities that the white minority enjoyed. The South African government did not hesitate to use considerable military force in order to keep the non-white majority in a state of subservience. However, a movement known as the African National Congress, (ANC) which had struggled against white domination for many years, became more influential during the 1950s and 60s. This was so even though one of its major leaders, Nelson Mandela, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1963 for treason against the white-minority government. In prison, Mandela became a symbol of the freedom struggle of his people, and inspired people around the world to take a stand against the racial injustices of apartheid in South Africa.

From the 1960s on, successive Canadian governments were strongly opposed to apartheid. In 1961, following a massacre of peaceful black protestors in that country, Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker headed an initiative within the Commonwealth, the group of countries that had once been colonies of Britain, to expel South Africa from the organization. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) inside Canada organized consumer boycotts of South African products, and worked to make the Canadian public more aware of the evils of apartheid. After a mass uprising of young South African high school and university students in 1976 was brutally crushed, a number of countries imposed trade and other economic sanctions against the country. The government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney strongly supported this step, even though some Canadian companies and financial institutions continued to invest in South Africa’s booming economy.

During the 1980s, as the situation inside South Africa appeared to be leading to a major confrontation, Canada continued to urge the white-minority government to abandon apartheid and begin serious negotiations with Mandela and the ANC. Mulroney urged U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to change their hostile positions on the ANC and call on the South African government to change its policies. Following the defeat of South African forces occupying part of Angola at the hands of Cuban troops in the 1980s, the end of white-minority rule in neighbouring Zimbabwe and Namibia, the continuing campaign of economic sanctions and other exclusionary measures against it, and, most significantly, the ANC’s struggle for liberation, the South African government finally accepted that apartheid was no longer tenable. Mandela was released from prison, the ANC was legalized, and negotiations towards the introduction of a multi-racial, democratic state began. In 1994, Mandela and the ANC won a landslide victory in the country’s first free election. Mandela served one term as South Africa’s first non-white president, and worked to promote peace and reconciliation among all the races in his country. After his retirement in 2000, he was invited to visit Canada, where he received an honorary citizenship in 2001, the first living non-Canadian to be bestowed this honour. In his acceptance speech for this award, he paid tribute to Canada’s long and unwavering support for the international campaign to end apartheid, and bring peace and justice to his country.