



Opinions

Finding Canada's place in the world

Unleash the power of our citizens

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Recent surveys indicate that Canadians increasingly care about international matters and want our country to play a constructive role in world affairs.

But what role should that be?

To help consider the options, globeandmail.com has invited three foreign policy activists to give us their thoughts and lead us in debate and discussion.

*Today, David Eaves, a public policy consultant, and the lead author of the 2004 Canada25 report *From Middle to Model Power*, concludes that we must unleash the great under-utilized power of our outward-looking citizenry in roles still to be determined.*

For two decades, pundits have argued that Canada has lost its way in the world, that it no longer articulates a clear role for itself. But, in our search for answers, perhaps we've asked the wrong question. Rather than "what is our role," maybe we need to reaffirm "what is our goal?"

To this question, the answer is remarkably consistent. Canada's foreign policy has sought to model and advance the ideals of our national experiment: peace, order and good government. In a world too often governed by realpolitik, Canadians have worked tirelessly to preserve and promote an international system that, grounded in international law, allows peaceful people everywhere — including in Canada — to select their governments, to trade and to move about safely.

For almost two centuries, we've pursued this objective. And yet, we've repeatedly redefined our role. In our efforts to improve and defend this system Canadians have, among other things: served as allies and fierce warriors, fighting in two world wars and one Cold one; operated as diplomatic honest brokers, inventing peacekeeping and

preventing war between superpowers; and organized as human rights and human security activists, extending the benefits of stability and justice to those who've known little of either.

And yet the pundits and politicians want us to choose just one — we may yet have an election over this. But Canadians know better. We've been all these things, and are proud of them not for what they were, but for what they were in service of.

More importantly, this diversity, and continuity, has never been more important. The challenges of the 21st century — international terrorism, global warming, ethnic conflict, weapons of mass destruction and collapsing eco-systems — are markedly different from those of the 20th century. Their dispersed and complex nature means no single actor — not even governments — can address them alone.

In the face of these challenges, Canada has, quietly, carved out a new role. As a country we may appear adrift, but, as individuals, Canadians are more effectively and successfully engaged than ever. Quietly, we've transitioned from a middle power — a plucky country whose government prevented conflicts and ensured stability — to a model power — a country whose plucky citizens innovate solutions to new global challenges.

In an era where technology enables individuals to self-organize, deploy resources, or simply get involved, Canadians have jumped at the opportunity. New groups such as Engineers Without Borders, Peace Dividend Trust, Journalists for Human Rights, help people channel their energy and focus on results. Broader still, the recent Canada's World poll suggests that Canadians gave \$7.3-billion to internationally focused non-profits over the past year. This is more than twice CIDA's budget of \$3-billion, and equivalent to 0.6 per cent of our GDP. And this doesn't even include the \$20-billion in remittances sent abroad annually or the hundreds of thousands of hours in international volunteer work donated by everyday citizens.

As a model power, Canadians enjoy their ability to strike out and serve as global citizens. Those I speak with are looking for — but not willing to wait for — leaders who will draw on our multiple identities.

Canadians want leaders who will be warriors when confronting those who would use violence to remake our world, diplomats when addressing the threats and opportunities in our global commons, and activists against anyone — even our allies — who would use their power to impinge on the rights and opportunities of others.

Most of all, Canadians are looking for leaders who will empower each of us. As employees, consumers, business owners, investors, aid workers and, above all, citizens, the decisions we each make increasingly shape Canada's reputation and impact. The modern world is one in which the capacity to affect international affairs is shared among organizations and, indeed, among all citizens. A foreign policy that enables each of us to make better choices in pursuit of our common goal will create a role in which Canada and Canadians will thrive.

Earlier: Lloyd Axworthy, president of the University of Winnipeg, and foreign minister of Canada from 1996-2000, argued we must throw out our slavish adherence to outdated U.S. policies and embrace truly international practices.

Earlier: Jack Granatstein, political and military historian, and senior research fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, insisted we must pursue our true national interests and they can never be divorced from those of the U.S. and other like-minded nations.

Question and Answer: Join Mr. Axworthy, Mr. Granatstein and Mr. Eaves in a discussion today on the issues raised in their essays.