

Canadians and the American Proposal

by Michael Lee

As the liberal world order collapses, many thinkers are seeking alternative visions of world order. Unfortunately, many of the commonly discussed options have obvious defects: liberal leviathans can become illiberal, world government risks global tyranny, while anarchy poses dangers of its own. In recent years, one group of scholars has sought to revive the libertarian interstate tradition of Hayek (1939). For instance, Deudney's (2010) vision of republican constitutionalism presents *negarchy* as a potential alternative to both anarchy and hierarchy and posits the Philadelphian system of early America as an example of this. Brandon Christensen (2021) has taken Deudney's ideas further, offering a practical means of implementing an interstate federalist system. Christensen argues that states should federate under the United States constitution, forming the basis for a liberal order. Christensen is to be commended for enunciating a logistically practical, clear, and creative proposal for polycentric global governance. At the same time, I am not sure that the proposal as designed can

overcome the fear of the loss of sovereignty by the countries to which it is being pitched. Understanding why others might spurn the offer is useful in revising it. Thus, I propose that we consider the reaction of some of the original recipients of the American proposal: Canadians.

Frank Sinatra said of New York that “if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere”. In other words, New York is a hard test. Sometimes, however, it is useful to expose ideas to easy tests. It is useful to remember that the American proposal was not merely pitched toward the original 13 colonies, but to the rest of British North America. Despite the cultural similarities between Americans and Canadians, the natural advantages of continental commerce versus transoceanic trade, the considerable antipathy of many Canadians toward the British Empire, and the relative indifference of the Empire to its Canadian colonies, Canadians soundly rejected the American proposal. My point is not to attack the American proposal, but rather, to encourage deeper thought about what the desire for sovereignty entails, and how such desires might be met. I worry that, much as the world federalists of the 1940s failed to understand the sovereign desires of the decolonizing world, the American proposal

offers institutional reassurances without satisfying the deeper motivations behind sovereignty (Jenkins 2022). The nation-state is invested with great emotional resonance, with national identity entwined with all manner of powerful attachments. To build interstate federalism without considering these currents is to swim against the tide.

This essay proceeds as follows. I sketch out an argument that fears about the loss of sovereignty are not merely about autonomy (which the American proposal addresses). In order to illustrate this, I turn to the case of the country most likely to have embraced the American proposal, Canada. I examine why Canada failed to join the American Revolution, failed to incorporate into the Philadelphian System, and then look at some instances where, subsequently, an independent Canada experienced backlash against American efforts to deepen integration. I conclude with a proposal to consider a more polycentric form of federalism including a federalism of federalisms. Specifically, I believe there are some groupings that are more natural to form because of the Tocquevillian (1835) associations underlying them. Simultaneously, I believe there is a need for an additional forum where elite representatives of the

federalisms can interact, bargain, and legislate. Autonomy and power are likely to be more important at the higher (inter-federal) level, while other concerns prevail at lower levels.

Autonomy is the not the sum of all fears

Deeply woven in the American proposal is a fear that the offer will be rejected on the grounds that it threatens the autonomy of potential member-states. For this reason, the main carrot offered to prospective members is membership in the senate as a guarantor of autonomy in much the same way as this offered a compromise between small and large states in the formative years of the United States. I would simply suggest that this emphasis misreads what others fear from the loss of sovereignty, and under-estimates the willingness of states to subsume themselves into larger orders *under the right circumstances*.

This very misperception has long plagued the interstate federalist tradition. In the writings of some liberal world-builders, cosmopolitan goals are often parlayed against the parochial goals of the nation-state (Mises 1927; Robbins 1937; Hayek 1939). Nowhere was this clearer than in the north-south divisions that emerged in the formation

of the liberal international order. Not only did world federalism fail because of a lack of support from the decolonizing global south, but so too did other grand projects like the International Trade Organization. But many of the leaders of the global south were not merely asserting a desire for Westphalian sovereignty. As Getachew (2019) argues, the project of decolonization was also often expressed in cosmopolitan terms. The Bandung conference of 1955, the G-77, and the non-aligned movement were not merely expressions of a desire for Westphalian sovereignty, but also for forms of interstate cooperation (albeit divergent from the ideals of classical liberals).

My point is simply that it matters a great deal how one makes the case for interstate federalism. The discursive content of an argument has great power to overcome ideological and other differences. Figures like Raul Prebisch (1950) dissuaded many in the global south from projects of free trade because he spoke to fears of continuing economic dependence, and declining terms of trade for commodity producers. On the other hand, some federating projects have seen ideologically diverse figures enthusiastically give up sovereignty. The European idea, for instance, unites socialists and

liberals, and has seen the European project take very different terms (e.g. contrast the European Coal and Steel Union to the formation of the ordoliberal-influenced European Union). The desire for sovereignty is not merely a desire for autonomy, it is also bundled with many deeply held values that transcend easy calculation: the desire for an end of empire, the desire to avoid a war as destructive as the Second World War. Similarly, one might think of the desire for the survival of one's culture: practices passed down for thousands of years that give meaning to the lives of oneself and one's ancestors.

Liberals once understood the need for a certain romantic element to their grand projects. From the American founding fathers to Mazzini and Garibaldi in Italy, larger liberal federations had great appeal. Nonetheless, we must recognize that the aesthetic and discursive content of those appeals matter. And even in the absence of such subtext, a bloodless, technocratic offer may be interpreted on the basis of who is offering it, and not the merit of the proposal.

Many explorations of the limits of interstate federalism jump from here to the rejection of world

federalism and a particular vision of internationalism by the global south in the 1940s. But in many ways, that is an overdetermined result, explicable on the basis of diverse interests and values. Rather, it may be more useful to explore the shoe that did not drop in the original American proposal. There has been perhaps no more natural prospective joiner of the Philadelphian system than Canada. Canada is culturally similar to the United States, it has often been deeply economically integrated with the US, and has had few natural alternatives to close cooperation with its American neighbors. Nonetheless, Canada and Canadians largely rejected the American proposal. At the same time, Canada and the United States have deeply integrated with one another over time. Thus, I submit that as a “most likely” case that has not come true, Canada offers valuable lessons about how to (and how not to) frame interstate federalist projects.

Canada in the Revolutionary War

In 1776, representatives of 13 colonies signed the Declaration of Independence, seceding from Britain. They were joined in the American Revolutionary War by the Republic of Vermont,

which would later be admitted into the United States. While the ambitions of the *Continental* Congress clearly extended further than the eastern seaboard, some parts of British North America opted against joining the revolution. These included East and West Florida, but also the Provinces of Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. Let us turn to the two most populous examples, Nova Scotia and Quebec.

Quebec had only recently become part of the British Empire, after being conquered in 1759, and then ceded by France in the Treaty of Paris ending the Seven Years War. Bitterness over the conquest¹²⁴ continues in Quebec to this day – so it may be rather surprising that scores of Quebeckers did not join the call to rebel against their English colonial rulers. However, some of the events prior to the revolution did much to reconcile the province and sour relations with the American rebels. The 1774 Quebec Act expanded the borders of Quebec westward into what is today Ohio, running afoul of the territorial interests of settlers desiring to expand there. Moreover, the Quebec Act upheld the right of

¹²⁴ Quebeckers will often refer to the defeat of French forces at the 1759 Battle of the Plains of Abraham and subsequent period of British rule as “la Conquête” – the conquest.

Quebeckers to practice Catholicism. The Continental Congress initially expressed outrage at the proposal, declaring that it was “dangerous in an extreme degree to the Protestant religion and to the civil rights and liberties of all America” (Suffolk Resolves 1774). The Continental Congress would soon change its mind, with the example of multi-religious Switzerland assuaging fears of a Catholic province. They invited Quebec to send delegates to the Continental Congress in 1775, but the damage had been done. Not only had the Quebec Act inured enough of the province to British rule, the reaction of the Continental Congress had hardly been welcoming. Later, the rebels authorized the creation of an army for the invasion of Canada, alongside investigations of the possibility of Quebeckers joining as a 14th colony (Anderson 2013). Despite some early successes, the invasion was a failure and, notably, did not produce a great uprising in the province. Indeed, the invasion backfired substantially by encouraging loyalists to fight alongside British soldiers in battles like the Siege of Quebec, transforming the identity of Quebec in the process (while putting the Patriots, who were more sympathetic to the rebels, on the backfoot).

The province of Nova Scotia (containing the contemporary provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) was another target for rebel persuasion. Acadia had been ceded to the British from France earlier, in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, although they did not gain full control of the entire region till the 1750s. Although there had been a substantial French population in the province, the settlement of Halifax in 1749 and the expulsion of Acadians (Cajuns) to Louisiana altered the demographic mix of the province. Moreover, because of strong trade ties to New England, many residents were New Englanders. Nonetheless, Nova Scotia also showed little sign of interest in the American proposal. Jonathan Eddy, a Massachusetts-born Nova Scotian attempted to raise a force to lead a rebellion in the province, but was defeated. Offers by the Continental Congress to invite the province similarly failed.

The question of federation was also part of the subtext of peace negotiations between the American rebels and the British. Britain's Prime Minister in 1782, the Earl of Shelburne, had been converted from a mercantilist worldview to a free trade one following a long carriage-ride shared with Adam Smith (Morrison 2012). Shelburne's initial vision

for peace entailed an Anglo-American federation, and free trade between the two peoples. Benjamin Franklin's insistence that the new United States gain the Canadian colonies proved a sticking point, and the resultant treaty was more modest, including the trade concessions but not the federation.

Despite the seeming attraction of the American proposal to Canadian colonies that had been recently conquered by Britain, and who were deeply integrated into the American economy, both Canadian elites and the Canadian public largely rejected the rebel cause during the Revolutionary War. Now, it is possible that one reason for this was a lack of clarity about what participation would entail. In 1776, neither the Articles of Confederation, nor the US Constitution had been established. Thus, it is necessary to look at the period after 1789 to see whether the existence of a more definite design proved more appealing to Canadians. As I will show, it did not.

From the Revolutionary War to the 1837 Rebellion

The United States Constitution went into effect in 1789, establishing the Philadelphian system in very much the terms presented by Christensen (2021).

While we know that the Canadian colonies did not join the United States, it can be useful to look at Canadian reactions to the prospect of annexation during the period. We should look particularly at whether representation in the senate assuaged fears of the loss of sovereignty. Although the period from 1789-1838 exhibited considerable discontent against both the local Canadian oligarchy and British rule, there is less evidence of strong pull factors drawing Canadians toward the United States. Indeed, one of the most important ways that opponents of the 1837 Rebellion would delegitimize the rebels was precisely by framing their goals as annexationists.

In some respects, American independence also resulted in the birth of an English Canadian nation. The Constitutional Act of 1791 split the Province of Quebec into Upper Canada (which would later become Ontario) and Lower Canada (which would later become Quebec). Upper Canada, initially settled by loyalists, became a predominantly English province, while Lower Canada remained overwhelmingly French. British grand strategy in North America envisioned the maintenance of the two colonies as a bulwark against the newly independent United States. Simultaneously, the

British provided arms to indigenous peoples in the west (whose lands had also been protected by the Royal Proclamation of 1763). However, British preoccupation with an existential conflict with Napoleonic France would present the United States with both an opportunity and a *Casus Belli* to renew their previous attempts to take Canada. Ongoing naval combat had left the British Empire in dire need of sailors. The British had responded to this need by impressing thousands of American seamen into British ranks.

Debate ensued in Congress between War Hawks like Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun in favor of invading Canada, and Federalists who opposed war. Among voices supportive of war, a common view held that victory would be relatively easy. Former President Thomas Jefferson¹²⁵ opined that the war would be “a mere matter of marching” while Calhoun¹²⁶ predicted that within four weeks “the whole of Upper Canada and a part of Lower Canada will be in our power.” Representative John Harper of New Hampshire was even more explicit about the Canadian desire for liberation, declaring that “They must sigh for an affiliation with the great

¹²⁵ Cited in Taylor (2010: 140).

¹²⁶ Cited in Adams (1986: 440).

American family – they must at least in their hearts hail that day, which separates them from a foreign monarch, and unites them by holy and unchangeable bonds, with a nation destined to rule a continent.”¹²⁷

In contrast to these sentiments, very few Canadians aided American forces in the war of 1812. Canadian elites strongly opposed the invasion, both in loyalist Upper Canada and French-speaking Lower Canada. Although there were relatively few British troops stationed in Canada, most significant battles in the war contained a considerable contingent of Canadian militiamen. Among those rallying the loyalist cause was the Catholic Church – in one sermon, Joseph-Octave Plessis, the Bishop of Quebec, called for God to deliver the people from “the treacherous ambition of an insatiable conqueror” (Plessis 107). In addition, British forces were aided by another substantial opponent of manifest destiny: indigenous peoples. Most notably, this included the grand confederacy rallied by the Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, though in Lower Canada, Mohawk allies aided the British as well. While the War of 1812 is often remembered as a

¹²⁷ Marche (2012).

stalemate, there were moments when American forces advanced deep into Canada. Following the American victory in the 1813 Battle of Lake Erie, General William Henry Harrison defeated the British and Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames, while American troops were also able to capture the city of York (now Toronto). However, American forces were unable to hold any of these territorial positions for long, in part because of the logistical challenges of force projection, but also, no doubt, due to the failure of Canadians to enthusiastically welcome American troops as liberators. Indeed, when American troops advanced they were often resisted by the Canadians, most notably when Laura Secord walked 20 miles through American-occupied territory to warn the British of an impending American attack. It is not difficult to imagine a substantially different outcome to the War of 1812 if even a substantial plurality of Canadians had been sympathetic to the cause.

Following the War of 1812, both Upper and Lower Canada would see political developments that should have represented fertile grounds for American ambitions of manifest destiny. In both colonies, narrow oligarchies (the Family Compact in Upper Canada, and the Chateau Clique in Lower

Canada) jealously guarded their power over the provincial legislatures. Moreover, in Upper Canada the arrival of new immigrants diminished the loyalist character of the province. Toronto printer William Lyon Mackenzie represented one of the most prominent voices for reform, showcasing the lack of democracy in the province by being repeatedly elected and then expelled from the legislature. Although inspired by American democracy, he took an ambivalent tone with the United States, saying the Americans “mock the ear with the language of freedom in a capital polluted with Negro slavery”¹²⁸ Simultaneously, in Lower Canada, the Patriotes coalesced in protest of the lack of democracy in the province, and of British rule. In 1834, Louis-Joseph Papineau would draft, and the Lower Canadian legislature would adopt a document containing 92 resolutions demanding political reforms (Greer 1993: 125-141). In both Upper and Lower Canada, the government responded to reformist efforts with intransigence. The Lieutenant Governor of Lower Canada pretended to entertain the 92 resolutions with commissions, finally revealing that he lacked the

¹²⁸ Quoted in Thompson and Randall (2008: 29). Relevant to the American proposal, Mackenzie was also apparently ignorant of the method by which senators were selected.

power to implement the measures even if he so desired. Meanwhile in Upper Canada, the Lieutenant Governor intervened directly in the election to ensure the election of a legislature friendly to the pro-Family Compact Tories.

By 1837, Mackenzie and Papineau were consigned to the need for a rebellion against their respective colonial governments. Although they framed their goal as the establishment of independent republics, loyalist figures (particularly in Upper Canada) framed the goals of the movements as being crypto-American (Read 1988: xxvi). This framing appealed beyond just the Family Compact. For instance, as Read (1988: lvi-lvii) notes, many Black Canadians were loyalists for fear of incorporation into a slave-owning American republic. In Lower Canada, as in the War of 1812, the Catholic Church was among the most powerful forces preaching loyalty. In Montréal, Bishop Lartigue warned congregants against revolutionary action, citing the example of the destruction wrought by the French Revolution, and warning against the idea of either a sovereign people or of unbridled liberty (Lartigue 1837: 14-27). Archbishop Joseph Signay denounced the revolution, declaring that there was “scarcely any revolution” that failed to a series of destructive

consequences including violent death, the destruction of families, and the destruction and seizure of property (Signay 1837: 373).

The first shots were fired in Lower Canada, where the Patriotes proclaimed an independent republic. Intense fighting broke out, but the rebels met both British redcoats and a sizeable loyalist militia on the battlefield. Loyalist victory forced Papineau to flee to the United States. Meanwhile in Upper Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie had been assembling a militia, which was to rise up on December 7, 1837. A much larger loyalist force marched on the rebel base in Montgomery's Tavern, defeating them. Mackenzie also fled to the United States, where he appealed for American aid to overthrow British rule in Canada. A secretive network of Hunters' Lodges formed in Vermont and elsewhere, aiming to launch raids into Canada in support of Mackenzie. While Mackenzie and his rebels briefly occupied Navy Island (in the Niagara river between Ontario and New York), and declared a Republic of Canada, his forces were driven back shortly thereafter (Read 1988). The exiled Lower Canadian rebels fared little better. Assembled in Vermont, radicals like Robert Nelson ended up alienating more moderate members (including Papineau) by pledging to

abolish seigneurial tenure (Greer 1993: 339). Those assembled were arrested by the United States for violating the Neutrality Act.

In short, despite considerable popular discontent against British rule, neither the rebellion in Upper nor in Lower Canada framed the rebellion in reference to the American proposal, although both Mackenzie and Papineau were sympathetic to the United States. In Upper Canada, loyalist forces invoked anti-Americanism in a successful attempt to undermine the rebellion. In Lower Canada, denunciations of revolutionary ideals (whether French or American) were similarly effective in mobilizing substantial forces to the loyalist cause. In exile, Mackenzie and Papineau's sympathy for the American idea would deepen, and both would come to openly advocate annexation. However, rather than forming a unifying cause in the developing Canadian political culture, "annexationist" came to embody a slur. Rather, the most successful embarkations in Canada-US integration have involved diplomatic and subtle invitations.

Canada-US Relations Since Confederation

It is reasonable to say that the American proposal was not well-received in Canada during the lifespan of the Philadelphian System. Canadians did not reject the American proposal because of a deep love of British rule, nor because of overwhelming British force. Nor were those Canadians sympathetic to the idea particularly concerned with the preservation of national autonomy (indeed, they lived in British colonies). Rather, liberals like Mackenzie and Papineau were drawn to the liberal ideals of the United States constitution. It is useful to ask whether there were forms of Anglo-Canadian cooperation that were attractive to Canadians and if so, under which circumstances? If the core of the appeal lies in the constitutional arrangements, we should see Canadian interest in deeper integration with the United States after the end of the Philadelphian System in 1861. On the other hand, if Canadian objections are rooted more deeply in how the offer is framed, we might see harsh reactions to insensitively framed entreaties.

The 1837 Rebellions triggered a process of reform that saw the formation of a unified province of Canada. The joint province proved unwieldy, and

unrepresentative – it granted equal representation to both former provinces, although Lower Canada was initially more populous. Dissatisfaction with the arrangement was joined with fear of American expansion, as the American Civil War saw the union field vast armies (while British actions like the sale of the *Alabama* to the Confederacy risked souring relations). Canadian leaders also feared that British disinterest left them vulnerable to American expansion in the west. An 1866 bill by Nathaniel Prentice Banks (R-MA) openly proposed annexation of British North America. Although the bill was not seriously considered, it was received poorly in Canada.¹²⁹ The expiry of the 1854-1866 reciprocity treaty, which had reduced trade barriers between Canada and the United States, further impelled the need for action. Initial negotiations saw the Confederation of a new Dominion of Canada inside the British Empire consisting of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The new country would soon expand even further, with the purchase of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company, the incorporation of British Columbia in 1871, and of Prince Edward

¹²⁹ Banks had likely authored a bill to appeal to Irish-Americans sympathetic to the Fenians, a particular sore spot for Canada, following the Fenian raids of 1859.

Island in 1873.¹³⁰ The British Columbian offer was contingent on the construction of a railroad across the continent, a key nation-building project of the new country.

Engagement with the United States became an issue of partisan division between the more continentalist Liberal Party, with support from the resource-exporting hinterlands, and the imperialist Conservative Party, with support in English-speaking industrial areas that feared competition with American goods. Like many developing countries in the 1950s (and like early America), the Conservatives adopted a policy of import-substitution known as the National Policy, combining tariffs on American goods with support for railroad construction (Hillmer and Granatstein, 2000: 1-12).

Efforts to negotiate freer trade were often presented as an annexationist stalking horse. For instance, although the Liberal Party of Wilfrid Laurier supported trade with the United States, it found itself undone by a 1911 reciprocity proposal from American President William H. Taft. When a letter from Taft to Roosevelt became public, expressing

¹³⁰ Newfoundland and Labrador did not join Canada till 1949.

the view that Canada would become “only an adjunct to the United States” (Hillmer and Granatstein, 2000: 40), opposition to annexation flared. House Speaker Champ Clark (D-MO) did little to assuage those fears when he declared “I hope to see the day when the American flag will float over every square foot of the British North American possessions, clear to the North Pole” (Hillmer and Granatstein, 2000: 40). These ill-chosen words saw the Conservative leader, Robert Borden charge that the American goal was the eventual annexation of Canada. One political cartoon depicted the United States as a tiger with its spots spelling out the dreaded word: “annexation”. The election was a drubbing for the Liberals, seeing the Conservatives win a strong majority government (Hillmer and Granatstein, 2000: 35-45).

Fear of American influence was not only expressed by Conservatives. Over time, the viability of a Canadian foreign policy oriented around close cooperation with the British Empire waned. Simultaneously, the political constituencies of Canada’s two main parties began to shift, with the Liberals becoming stronger in the cities, and the Conservatives coming to be rooted more deeply in hinterland regions that predominantly exported

resources to American markets (Lee 2015). By the 1960s, one could find a more left-wing expression of Canadian nationalism in both the socialist New Democratic Party and the centrist Liberal Party. For instance, concerns about the spread of American culture in Canada saw efforts to pass laws requiring Canadian content on television and in magazines. In the 1970s, following the Nixon Shocks, the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau, designed a foreign policy vision known as the “third option”, treating deeper activity through international organizations as an alternative to integration with the United States and the now-obsolete British option (Hillmer and Granatstein, 2000: 265-312). The 1988 “free trade” Canadian election would pit free-trade Conservatives against protectionists in the NDP and the Liberal Party. Liberal support surged as John Turner warned that free trade would undermine Canadian healthcare and sovereignty. One Liberal ad depicted an American negotiator saying there was just “one line” he wanted to remove from the treaty, and then proceeding to erase the border. Free trade only passed because the latter two parties split the vote in a first-past-the-post electoral system (they collectively won over 52% of the vote vs. 43% for the Conservatives). Conservative Prime

Minister Brian Mulroney was at times viewed with suspicion for his close relationship with Ronald Reagan, such as when the two sang “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” together. Canadian historian Jack Granatstein (1997) described the incident as one of the most demeaning in the history of Canada-US relations.

The most recent efforts by American President Donald Trump to annex Canada “as the 51st state” met with a similarly hostile reception. While many Americans viewed the proposition as something of a joke, Canadians did not. When one poll offered Canadians the binary choice between joining the United States as the 51st state and rejoining the British Empire, 82% of respondents chose the latter.¹³¹ While the governing Liberal Party led by then-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had been politically moribund, strong opposition to Trump’s remarks saw his successor, Mark Carney effect the biggest polling reversal in the history of Canadian federal elections. While the Liberals had polled as low as 16% in the polls in December of 2024, Carney won 43.8% of the vote on election day. Carney was not some charismatic populist bolt from

¹³¹ Earle (2025).

the blue – he was a former Central Banker who spoke French poorly, representing an exhausted political party seeking its 4th consecutive mandate. Nonetheless, the fact that his opponent, who had likened himself to Trump, was less stridently opposed to Trump’s remarks was sufficient for voters to rally around Mark Carney.

My point is not that Canadians are inveterately hostile to the United States or anathema to close cooperation with Americans. Quite the contrary, Canadians are deeply enmeshed in American culture, the United States is overwhelmingly the largest trading partner of Canada, and the two cooperate deeply on most international questions. What is striking, is that this cooperation has often developed in spite of formal agreements between the two countries. Rather, cooperation has been deepest via organic processes (cosmos in the sense of Hayek), while it has waned when deeper integration is presented as a pathway to annexation.

Canadian fears of the loss of sovereignty are not merely about the loss of autonomy, but also about the preservation of a distinct culture. Ironically, Quebec separatists have been among the least amenable to leaving Canada for the United States

because they are more fearful of their ability to preserve their identity inside a country of hundreds of millions of Anglophones. It is not just that people are not *Homo Economicus*, but even to entertain rational calculations of utility, one must consider the cultural context in which one's actions are taken. The fear of annexation is not just about a loss of autonomy, but even worse, a kind of obliteration. What if a world emerges wherein all my decisions, priorities, and accomplishments are viewed in some alien light? It should not be surprising to us that people think this way – there are aspects of this sentiment in the fear of the dislocated rust belt worker or the senior citizen encountering cultural change. When we pretend that these fears can be overcome by trade adjustment assistance or telling the senior to “get with the times” we are ignoring political reality. Similarly, the American proposal is not likely to assuage the fears of the loss of sovereignty.

At the same time, Canadian resistance to the American proposal also tells us something *positive* about the prospects for interstate federalism: the sovereign state is not the only vehicle capable of summoning soaring sentiments. Recall the scene of 1837 – French Canadian bishops urging the people

of Québec to preserve valued cultural institutions by resisting popular sovereignty, and being loyal to the British Empire. The cultural institutions that people value map onto different transnational constellations in complex ways.

Toward a Federation of Federations

What is the best way forward for interstate federalism? I would simply suggest stepping back from the idea that the most important obstacle is a fear of the loss of autonomy. The sovereign state can be an expression of *cultural* sovereignty, but so too can some forms of federal or other transnational associations. For instance, consider CANZUK – a proposed federation between Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Britain. Unlike Canadian suspicion of annexation, such a union is overwhelmingly popular, even though it does not address potential issues of differential power levels between the constituent parts. Despite the evaporation of formal ties linking the countries together, there is a lingering kindred spirit between the four countries that is organic and rooted in shared institutions and cultural practices. Something like the European idea, or the Bolivarian dream can play a similar role in Europe and Latin America, respectively. We are

all part of organic communities that are larger than the Westphalian nation-state. Because of the mutual trust underlying those communities, many would more readily give up sovereignty for the benefits of deeper integration.

At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that the emergence of more federalisms will necessarily be able to resolve the kinds of challenges we might want a global order to address – whether we are talking about the provision of public goods (especially security), the assurance of common rules, or the preservation of open trade and migration. For this reason, it may be useful to have a federalism of federalisms. Let a thousand flowers bloom but let each party send representatives to engage in negotiation with one another. It is at the inter-federal level, the level that would primarily be navigated by elites, where the American proposal has the most resonance. What is more, deeper and closer interactions within smaller federations will expand the political space for mutually beneficial interactions at higher-level arenas of action, such as in a federation-of-federations.¹³² For instance, consider Canada’s longstanding system of supply

¹³² See Ostrom (2010) for an application of this idea to climate change.

management, by which prices of dairy, poultry, and eggs are regulated by the government to limit production. The issue has long been a sticking point in trade negotiations with the United States, but Canadian dairy farmers are politically powerful.¹³³ But it might be easier to resolve the issue in the context of negotiating CANZUK, both because of the fellow-feeling between Canadians and other CANZUK members, and because dairy imports from distant trading partners are less threatening than those from the gigantic United States. At the same time, resolving the dairy question at the lower level could reduce or eliminate it as a source of dissensus at higher level forums for negotiation.

What might this look like in practice? A federation-of-federations design could accommodate a mix of sovereign states and federations (see Table 1). This would likely involve a set of rules that offer strong blocking powers to members. At the same time, it might be important to

¹³³ The clearest demonstration of this occurred in the 2017 Conservative leadership race, which was being decided via a voting mechanism where all Canadian ridings were equally weighted. Many dairy farmers purchased memberships in ridings with few Conservatives lived, enabling Andrew Scheer to prevail over Maxime Bernier, who wanted to abolish supply management.

avoid going too far in that direction. When international conglomerations have operated via *consensus*, they have often run up against hard limits. The League of Nations broke down because consensus gave the great powers little reason to participate in an organization they would have to underwrite, while retaining no greater legal authority than tiny states. The European Council has, at times, been hamstrung by a truculent Hungary under the rule of Viktor Orbán. The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, in requiring consensus, proved unable to resolve trade disputes. Increasing the number of veto players in a system tends to produce stasis, and if the status quo is defined by protectionism, bellicism, and national preferences, the result might be to preserve the worst features of Westphalian sovereignty.

It is here that Christensen's invocation of the US senate might prove the most useful – granting legislative equality to federations and the large states joining the federation-of-federations, producing a semblance of negarchy, but not requiring perfect consensus.

Table 1: A Hypothetical Membership of a Federation of Federations

Types of organizations						
Federations	European Union	CANZUK	ASEAN	Mercosur-Andean Community	African	Sovereign members
Sovereign states	EU member states	Canada, New Zealand, UK, Australia	ASEAN member states	Mercosur/Andean Community member states	ACFTA member states	United States, India, Japan, South Korea, Mexico

The tradeoff between effectiveness and overreach remains, as always, a problem to consider, and the example of the senate is an appealing one.¹³⁴

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine an extensive community of sovereign states federating without strong consideration of the organic connections they have to one another. Even Canada, with close cultural, political, historical, and economic ties to the United States, would likely balk at such a proposition, as Canadian history has repeatedly shown. At the same time, many states are part of organic communities that could form the basis of larger federations. It is easier to accept the tradeoffs inherent in deeper integration and political union among family. Those federations, in turn, can then meet in a larger federation-of-federations, linking together federations and larger sovereign states into a larger

¹³⁴ Extreme disparities in representation might still be best avoided. For instance, I am not sure it would make sense to give Switzerland and the United States two votes apiece. But the polycentric design of a federalism-of-federalisms would grant states different options. Some might engage with the body in a similar manner to Norway's relationship with the European Union. Others might make arrangements with different federations.

body capable of providing public goods, reducing barriers, and pursuing collective security.

Michael Lee is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at CUNY-Hunter College. Send him mail: ml1124@hunter.cuny.edu.

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