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Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and American President John F. Kennedy were both larger than life personalities. Diefenbaker, the Prairie populist, and Kennedy, the elite, debonair New Englander, came from completely different worlds. The fact that they did not get along particularly well is not an historical secret. By reason of geography and alliances, however, the relationship between the two political leaders was, and continues to be, of great importance and interest to historians, though lamentably this interest is focused primarily on the northern side of the border. It is this relationship between Canada and the United States during the turbulent years of the early 1960s that Asa McKercher, the L.R. Wilson Assistant Professor of History at McMaster University, examines in his new book, *Camelot and Canada: Canadian-American Relations in the Kennedy Era*.

This roundtable brings together scholars of Canadian history, American history, Canadian-American relations, and even a Canadian scholar living in the United States. Stephen Azzi, Jack Cunningham, Daniel Macfarlane, and Robert Rakove all have a strong grasp of the relevant historiography, and two of them initially wondered what else there was that could possibly be added to the canon on Kennedy and/or Diefenbaker. Macfarlane admits that he initially considered writing his doctoral dissertation on Diefenbaker’s relations with the United States, but did not think there was enough new to say. The reviewers’ unanimous consensus, however, is that McKercher has added an important contribution to the understanding of Canadian-American relations during the Kennedy years; two reviewers believe the book should or will be considered the “standard work” on the topic and Rakove thinks it “deserves to be read amid other recent portraits of Kennedy.”

All reviewers agree that this is a well-written and researched work. It covers all of the highs and lows of the Diefenbaker-Kennedy relationship: visits to Ottawa and Washington, nuclear weapons, the infamous Walt Rostow memorandum, relations with Cuba and the Missile Crisis, but it also includes sections on the oft-overlooked Berlin Crisis and British move to join the European Common Market—a move which was opposed in Ottawa but supported by Kennedy and which McKercher pinpoints as the beginning of the end for Canadian-American relations. However, the decline in relations is not solely a product of Camelot for, as McKercher adeptly demonstrates in his first chapter, trouble was already brewing during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower.

While earlier works addressing this topic have often focused on the personal relationship, or lack thereof, between the two leaders, the reviewers approve of McKercher’s more subtle and nuanced approach. To do otherwise, Rakove believes, “would give short shrift to the powerful political, economic, and cultural factors at work on both sides of the border.” Jack Cunningham notes that the work helps to dispel myths which have grown out of Diefenbaker’s perceived and real anti-Americanism, and there were in fact many instances of cooperation between the two nations. For Azzi, though, it is Canadian nationalism that is “one of the large forces that looms constantly in McKercher’s narrative.” Macfarlane appreciates this as well.

You have a good book on your hands when some of the worst criticisms are about the copy editing and three missed typos. Macfarlane, in fact, is the only reviewer who actually raises disagreements with McKercher’s interpretations, though he does so in the same “spirit of collegiality” that he notes McKercher uses when challenging those who preceded him. The main issue which Macfarlane raises is the idea of a special relationship between Canada and the United States with the thought that it was devoid of any linkage. Macfarlane cites several instances where seemingly unrelated policies were brought to bear pressure and rightly
points out that when push came to shove—specifically on issues of national security—“the United States was not afraid to apply pressure.” Macfarlane also astutely identifies that cross-border relations occur at many levels and, while the President and diplomats may have preferred to avoid linkage if possible, members of Congress did not always fall in line and were often “the loudest exponents of direct linkage.” As a result, Macfarlane suggests that it was an era “defined by a relative lack, but not total absence, of linkage.”

Tied together by trade, alliances, and geography, relations between Canada and the United States are complex and multifaceted, all the more so because of the power and size differentials involved. Kennedy and Diefenbaker certainly had their differences, though they were arguably by no means the worst pairing witnessed during the twentieth century. Rakove, the lone American historian, suggests that the U.S. “ought to pay closer attention” to Canada, though with a new and untested administration in Washington I suspect there are many in Ottawa who would prefer to keep their heads down and avoid any notice whatsoever. Prime ministers and presidents have always had their ups and downs, yet regardless of how low they may ebb, relations, aided by constant and dutiful work at the bureaucratic level, have always plodded on.

Participants:

Asa McKercher is L.R. Wilson Assistant Professor of History at McMaster University. He is currently completing an international and transnational history of Canada-Cuba relations from 1958-1979 and, with Galen Roger Perras, is editor of Between Idealism and Pragmatism: Lester Pearson and Canadian External Affairs, to be published in 2017 by University of British Columbia Press.

Michael K Carroll is an Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. He is author of Pearson’s Peacekeepers: Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-1967 (UBC Press, 2009) and, most recently, co-editor (with Greg Donaghy) of From Kinshasa to Kandahar: Canada and Fragile States in Historical Perspective (University of Calgary Press, 2016). He is currently working on a study of Canada’s involvement in the International Control Commissions in Indochina.

Stephen Azzi is associate professor and program supervisor in the Clayton H. Riddell Graduate Program in Political Management at Carleton University. He is author of Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism (McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1999) and Reconcilable Differences: A History of Canada–US Relations (Oxford University Press, 2015). He is now engaged in a comparative study of the leadership styles of Canadian prime ministers since 1957.

Jack Cunningham has a Ph.D. in History from the University of Toronto, where he is Program Coordinator at the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary International History, in Trinity College and the Munk School of Global Affairs, as well as editor of International Journal. He recently coedited Australia and Canada in Afghanistan: Perspectives on a Mission and Australia, Canada, and Iraq: Perspectives on an Invasion.

Daniel Macfarlane is an Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University. He received a Ph.D. in 2011 from the University of Ottawa and is the author of Negotiating a River: Canada, the US, and the Creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway (2014), the co-editor of Border Flows: A Century of the Canadian-American Water Relationship (2016), and the author of other publications on aspects of Canada-U.S. relations and border waters. He is currently engaged in research projects on the transnational history of engineering Niagara Falls,
Great Lakes water levels, the International Joint Commission, and Canadian-American environmental diplomacy.

Robert Rakove is a lecturer in International Relations at Stanford University. He is the author of *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge, 2012), and is presently at work on a history of U.S.-Afghan relations in the decades preceding the Soviet invasion.
The historiography on United States foreign policy under President John F. Kennedy is now in its third distinctive phase. Following the hagiography that perpetuated the myth of Camelot and after the highly critical work of revisionists, the last several years have seen an increasing number of post-revisionist works, scholarship that pays more attention to broader historical forces than personal conflicts and portrays the president as restrained, patient, and wise. In *Camelot and Canada: Canadian–American Relations in the Kennedy Era*, Asa McKercher provides a distinctly post-revisionist examination of Canada–U.S. relations in the early 1960s.

The literature on the Kennedy-era relationship between the United States and its northern neighbour is extensive. Journalist Knowlton Nash and historian John Boyko have each devoted a book to the subject, and the topic has featured prominently in Denis Smith’s superb biography of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, the memoir/history of the prime minister’s foreign affairs adviser Basil Robinson, and countless other books and articles. Picking up this volume, a reader might reasonably wonder whether there is anything for McKercher to add.

The answer is yes. McKercher’s exhaustive review of published and archival sources allows him not only to identify many factual errors in earlier works, but also to challenge prevailing interpretations. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on the personal clash between President and Prime Minister. McKercher recognizes the significance of personality in the Canadian–American relationship, but puts more emphasis on larger forces, particularly the Canadian public’s sensitivity to perceived threats to the country’s sovereignty and growing Canadian doubts about the United States’ hardline foreign policy during the hottest years of the Cold War. On the international stage, Canadian caution and American activism were bound to come into conflict, regardless of who headed each country’s government. As McKercher points out, there were

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significant conflicts between Canada and the United States before Kennedy came to office in 1961 and they continued after Diefenbaker lost the election of 1963.

In this book, Kennedy and the knights of Camelot come off not as high-handed and domineering, as they appear in much of the Canadian scholarship, but as patient and pragmatic. U.S. officials, “more often than not, yielded to the Canadian point of view on points of bilateral friction.” (10) In this, McKercher has extended the tolerant ally thesis, which was developed in Greg Donaghy’s *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States, 1963–1968*, back to the late 1950s and early 1960s.3 Both Donaghy and McKercher emphasize American forbearance on those occasions when Canada diverged from U.S. policy, especially when nationalist sentiment pushed Canada away from its closest ally.

McKercher is similarly inclined to view Diefenbaker more positively than earlier writers, arguing that “in light of the nationalist impulse in Canada, too much blame for the weakening of Canadian–American ties should not be levelled at Diefenbaker.” (225) The Prime Minister’s dithering and deception were a product, at least in part, of two challenges: Canada’s uncertain place in a rapidly changing world and a divergence in the Cold-War outlook of Canadians and Americans.

Eventually, as McKercher shows, relations between Kennedy and Diefenbaker were poisoned. For McKercher, the turning point was not when Kennedy made fun of Diefenbaker’s French or questioned his ability to catch a large marlin – episodes often highlighted in earlier works – or even the Prime Minister’s hesitation to support the President’s actions during the Cuban missile crisis. Instead, McKercher argues that the conflict had its roots in the fallout from Britain’s application to join the European Common Market, a move that the United States supported and Canada opposed.

Canadian nationalism, with Diefenbaker as its personification, is one of the impulses that loom constantly in McKercher’s narrative. This nationalism differs substantially from the sentiment I examined in *Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism*.4 In my work, the nationalists tended to be younger, well-educated Canadians, centred in Southern Ontario. Concerned primarily by U.S. economic control of Canada, their thoughts were voiced by the liberal newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, and by Walter Gordon, senior advisor to Liberal leader Lester Pearson and later Minister of Finance in Pearson’s Cabinet. Diefenbaker did not embody this variant of Canadian nationalism. Instead, the Prime Minister seemed to speak for an earlier variety of nationalism, one rooted in an older population in rural Canada, deeply troubled by the loosening of Canada’s bond to Britain and the increasing intimacy of Canada’s alliance with the United States.

Diefenbaker’s nationalism and his views of the Canada–U.S. relationship were neither static nor clear-cut. In the 1950s, he was swift to stand up for the United States when he suspected others of anti-Americanism. Yet he perceived political benefits in attacking the U.S., particularly at election time. As his relationship with Kennedy deteriorated, Diefenbaker’s reactions to the U.S. became more visceral – and more out of touch with the Canadian mainstream. He felt, no doubt, that Canadians were behind him, but over time he spoke for a

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smaller and smaller segment of his country’s population. By 1963, Diefenbaker was disconnected from urban voters, young people, and French-speaking Canada. Despite out-campaigning Liberal leader Lester Pearson, Diefenbaker lost the 1963 election, which he fought on the issue of Canada–U.S. relations. If he personified a form of Canadian nationalism, it was a variant that was on its deathbed.

Exhaustively researched, carefully argued, and clearly-written, McKercher’s work is the standard source on a subject that, perhaps more than any other, has captivated historians of Canada–U.S. relations. The book may well close some longstanding debates in the literature, but other avenues remain open to scholars. We need to know more about the role of anti-Americanism in the 1957 and 1958 election campaigns, Diefenbaker’s relationship with President Dwight Eisenhower, and the Prime Minister’s connection to the disarmament movement—to name just three of the issues that could use greater scrutiny from historians. McKercher’s book provides a model of how they could proceed.
McKercher’s slim, persuasive volume compels revision of one of the most tumultuous periods in Canadian-American relations, that during the joint tenure in office of President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker. In the Canadian general election of 8 April 1963, Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservative government lost power to Lester Pearson’s Liberals, just five years after winning the largest majority to that point in Canadian history, 208 out of 265 seats. The 1963 election was one in which foreign policy and Canadian-American relations loomed large, particularly Diefenbaker’s refusal to equip Canadian armed forces with American nuclear weapons and his failure to back Kennedy wholeheartedly in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Diefenbaker’s rapid ascent and precipitous fall have become the stuff of political legend in Canada, though they are at best a historical footnote elsewhere. A few months after Diefenbaker’s electoral humiliation, the public perception of him as a pathological ditherer too prone to consult his voluminous mailbag before making a decision was cemented by a bestselling account by one of Ottawa’s best-connected reporters, Peter C. Newman of the Canadian news magazine *Maclean’s, Renegade in Power*, which remained in print or more than twenty-five years. If Newman’s account can be credited for helping to destroy Diefenbaker’s subsequent hopes of a political comeback, the philosopher George Grant’s 1965 polemic *Lament for a Nation* made him a martyr to the rising Canadian nationalist cause. In Grant’s telling, Diefenbaker had been undermined by the Kennedy administration and its Canadian sympathizers in the Liberal Party, the federal bureaucracy, the media, and the political class generally, his defeat marking the end of Canadian independence.

Subsequent historians, even those not notably sympathetic to Diefenbaker, have tended to be highly critical of Kennedy and his administration’s conduct toward the Diefenbaker government, often echoing Grant’s basic charge of American complicity in Diefenbaker’s downfall. Occasional journalistic rehashings of the tale treat us to the familiar picture of an indecisive Diefenbaker and a Kennedy who was abrasive, imperious, and ignorant of Canadian realities. Denis Smith, the author of the standard biography of Diefenbaker, relying heavily on Diefenbaker’s own papers, presents a similar version of events, depicting Diefenbaker as

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characterized by “congenital caution, disorganization, and shallow intellectual focus” with Kennedy “the brash and confident newcomer revelling in his power” and all too eager to shove Canada around.5

With the release of increasing amounts of relevant documentation on both sides of the border, recent scholars have begun the task of revising the myth-encrusted perception of the Kennedy-Diefenbaker period. Bruce Muirhead has demonstrated that while Diefenbaker may have come to office worrying about American dominance of the Canadian economy and then embarked on an ill-fated effort to divert 15% of Canadian trade from the United States to the United Kingdom, Canadian-American economic interdependence continued to operate smoothly for the most part, with the Kennedy administration continuing the practice of exempting Canada from punitive measures aimed at other trading partners despite Diefenbaker’s occasional lapses into protectionism.6 And Patricia McMahon has demonstrated that Newman’s version of Diefenbaker’s inability to make a decision is overdrawn.7 Rather than indecisive, she argues, Diefenbaker was profoundly cautious, befitting a man whose political career had been characterized by numerous setbacks (Diefenbaker was elected to the House of Commons after five previous efforts to win public office failed, and became leader of his party only on the third try), and a devoted student of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada’s longest-serving Prime Minister, who was notoriously prone to defer decisions until political conditions were ripe. In McMahon’s telling, Diefenbaker was prepared to acquire nuclear weapons, but feared that public opinion on the question was volatile and might turn against him. He also feared being outflanked by Pearson, who opposed equipping Canadian forces with nuclear weapons until he changed position in a January 1963 speech.

McKercher assesses the Canadian-American relationship in the round for this period, and in the process not only provides a synthesis of the recent scholarship but breaks much ground of his own, relying on extensive research in Canadian and American archival sources. In the process he puts the tense personal relationship between the two leaders in perspective. That they were deeply dissimilar is obvious, and the old-fashioned platform stemwinders of the Saskatchewan lawyer could not be less like the crisp Boston cadences of the wealthy Ambassador’s son who was almost twenty years his junior. That Kennedy found Diefenbaker rustic and tedious is well-attested, and Diefenbaker seems to have quickly concluded that Kennedy was brusque and took Canada for granted. But deeper forces were at play. McKercher demonstrates that even in the seemingly placid Dwight D. Eisenhower period, informed American observers in the State Department and the press were noting the fraying of the early Cold War cross-border consensus and the emergence of a more nationalistic mood in Canada, of which Diefenbaker’s election was as much an expression as a cause. A Royal Commission appointed by Diefenbaker’s Liberal predecessor had sounded the tocsin over the extent of American control over the Canadian economy, while a 1960 bestseller by the Canadian Broadcasting

5 Denis Smith, Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker (Toronto, Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 285, 381.


Corporation’s Washington correspondent advocated a nonaligned foreign policy.8 Diefenbaker may have been more willing to defer to the wartime supreme Eisenhower (or Eisenhower better able to manage Diefenbaker’s difficult personality), than would be the case with Kennedy, but there were strains in the relationship even then. And of course it was during the Eisenhower administration that Diefenbaker agreed in the first place to acquire the Boeing CIM-10 surface-to-air missile (popularly named the Bomarc after the Boeing Michigan Aeronautical Research Center) and Starfighter weapons systems that were useless without nuclear weapons.

McKercher demonstrates that, contrary to legend, Diefenbaker was a vigorous Cold Warrior, as vehement in prosecuting the struggle as Kennedy himself, though with different views on strategy and tactics. The two met in Washington soon after Kennedy’s inauguration and again in Ottawa, and found ways of cooperating in the battle for the allegiance of the Third World, where they could agree on the need for development assistance to win over the uncommitted. Kennedy for his part “sought active Canadian assistance on several fronts and viewed Canada as an important ally” while “Canada’s government sought to balance doubts about the direction of US foreign policy with its obligations and own shared interest in containing communism” (55). At Kennedy’s urging, Diefenbaker signed on to Canadian membership of the International Control Commissions for Laos and Vietnam, and “turned a blind eye” to American violations of the Geneva Accord in the form of military assistance to South Vietnam (83). Differences were pronounced on the question of trade with Communist nations, where the Kennedy administration favoured vigorous sanctions and Ottawa believed forcing Red China and Cuba into economic isolation would be counter-productive. Yet Diefenbaker acquiesced in restrictions on trade with Cuba that were more stringent than those accepted by most other allies, and, after the foolish attempted invasion at the Bay of Pigs, overruled the advice of the Department of External Affairs and delivered a speech that made plain his lack of sympathy for Fidel Castro’s revolution. For his part, once Kennedy was informed that attempts to restrict trade with the Communist world by American-owned Canadian subsidiaries would be seen in Canada as trampling on the smaller nation’s sovereignty, he agreed to exemptions for Canada from measures that intensified economic sanctions on Cuba. In the same spirit, he declined to obstruct Canadian wheat sales to China. The two leaders were largely in harmony once Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev threatened to close off Western access to Berlin and ended a moratorium on nuclear testing. Diefenbaker called publically for Western solidarity over Berlin and criticized Moscow for the resumption of nuclear testing even after Kennedy followed suit and despite his own misgivings and the more severe ones of Foreign Minister Howard Green. In accepting in principle the need to acquire nuclear arms, Diefenbaker could be scornful in Cabinet of anti-nuclear sentiment even while he recognized its potential political dangers to his own position.

On other issues, Diefenbaker could be obdurate, sometimes with reason. Kennedy pressed for Canadian accession to the Organization of American States, while Diefenbaker was adamant that public opinion was unready for such a step. But he had little to offer beyond platitudes about the Commonwealth in the face of Kennedy’s advocacy for British entry into the Common Market, a step Diefenbaker feared as eroding the preferences that helped Canada sell agricultural products in Britain as well as the political links he saw as a counterbalance to American influence. But his stance here placed him on the wrong side of British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan as well as Kennedy, and left him no option beyond impotent criticism.

In McKercher’s account, Canada was more supportive of Kennedy’s actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis than previously thought, giving the lie to conspiracy theories that see Diefenbaker’s footdragging as leading Kennedy to collude in his ouster. True, Diefenbaker initially seemed to question Kennedy’s claim that Soviet offensive missiles had been deployed on Cuba and doubted the legality of the American quarantine. He also delayed an affirmative response to Washington’s request that Canadian forces be placed on enhanced alert status, although Defence Minister Douglas Harkness took this step before Cabinet granted authorization. At the same time, once the nuclear showdown had begun, Canada stepped up its intelligence-sharing on Cuba with the United States, and warned Cuban diplomats that the missiles had to be removed, actions the Kennedy administration appreciated.

It was the issue of nuclear weapons that precipitated the decisive and public break. Kennedy was keenly aware of Diefenbaker’s sensitivity to domestic opinion and patiently waited more than two years for the Prime Minister to acquire the weapons under a dual-key arrangement like that enjoyed by Britain. Only in early 1963, when Diefenbaker went beyond procrastination to publicly disclosing the secret bilateral conversations about the weapons and misrepresenting their nature, while still declining to commit himself, did Washington act. A State Department news release was sent out, clarifying the situation and helping to precipitate the Cabinet crisis that triggered the fall of the minority government Diefenbaker had led since the 1962 federal election. In the ensuing election, despite a universal preference for Pearson’s Liberals, the Kennedy administration went out of its way not to interfere, acutely conscious that any American intervention on Pearson’s behalf was sure to backfire. The most that Kennedy’s team seems to have done is encourage the President’s pollster, Louis Harris, to work for Pearson, though it is far from clear that his work was a major factor in the election outcome. McKercher is right to conclude that the administration’s “intervention into Canadian domestic affairs is understandable—and, dare it be said, defensible—when one gets a sense of their intense frustration with four years of delay and broken promises” (177). He also notes that Pearson’s victory was not the coming of the millennium; while the State Department’s Canadianists and the Canadian foreign service managed to keep the relationship on an even keel over the next five years, there were ongoing tensions rooted largely in differences over the right course to follow in Vietnam.9

A question of interest to specialists in American foreign policy more broadly is whether Kennedy’s handling of Diefenbaker was sui generis or if it sheds light on his larger approach to the world. The early hagiographic literature on Kennedy10 long ago gave way to a new orthodoxy in which he is portrayed as an unreflective and impetuous Cold Warrior.11 McKercher’s study echoes the key findings of the best post-revisionist studies of other aspects of Kennedy’s foreign policy. Robert Rakove has demonstrated that Kennedy was prepared to

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accept a fair amount of disagreement with American policies on the part of newly decolonized states while Fredrik Logevall has persuasively argued that Kennedy struggled to avoid a massive American commitment to South Vietnam, more aware than his subordinates of the pitfalls of military involvement. The picture that is starting to emerge is that of a Kennedy who was no saint, but more pragmatic, and less ideological, than some of his rhetoric suggested and than his critics contend. True, geographic proximity and interdependence in economics and security do make the Canadian-American relationship unique, but McKercher’s study implies lessons for future scholars of Kennedy’s foreign policy in the round. He establishes that despite the vast disproportion in power between Canada and the United States, Kennedy never seriously considered linking issues in a way that would bring America’s full might to bear on its neighbour, and he seems to have been for the most part equally restrained elsewhere.

Sadly, McKercher has not been well-served by the copy-editors at Oxford University Press, who have allowed an unconscionable number of typos, misprints, and plain errors to slip by. These include “Untied States” (34), an anachronistic “Ms. Kennedy” for Jacqueline Kennedy (77) and “David Fulton” for Diefenbaker’s Cabinet colleague E. Davie Fulton (205). Both the book and the author deserved better.

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I became interested in John Diefenbaker during my undergraduate years at the University of Saskatchewan. In that province, Diefenbaker is a bit of folk hero since he is regarded as the only Prime Minister to hail from there (though he was born in Ontario, and was actually the third Prime Minister to have Prince Albert as his federal riding since Wilfrid Laurier and Mackenzie King had both parachuted in to get a safe seat). While working as a tour guide at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre on the U of S campus, then as an archivist at the same institution, I was exposed to all things Diefenbaker. Even the elderly gentleman from whom I rented a basement suite near campus had known Diefenbaker, and over tea regaled me with stories about trips around town with ‘John.’

Thus, I admit that I was predisposed towards a sympathetic view of Diefenbaker, and my nascent iconoclastic tendencies chafed against the repeated negative academic portrayals of the Chief. Growing out of a paper written in my last year of undergraduate studies, and taking advantage of my position as an archivist at the Diefenbaker Canada Centre, the first academic article I ever published was on Diefenbaker and the Coyne Affair, a quarrel between James Coyne (Governor of the Bank of Canada) and the Prime Minister over fiscal policy and inflation. Later, during my doctoral studies, I took a class on the history of Canadian foreign policy. At my supervisor’s suggestion, I wrote a term paper on Diefenbaker and the 1961 Berlin Wall Crisis, based on research undertaken at Library and Archives Canada (this was in 2007, well before most of its services had been pared down—they still had a cafeteria at that point), insisting that Diefenbaker’s handling of this major standoff and its Canadian-American dimensions had been even-tempered and quite effective, yet overlooked.

I ultimately published that paper but my thoughts of expanding it into a more sympathetic interpretation of Diefenbaker’s foreign policy floundered, not only because I became more interested in other subjects, but also because I had determined that there was not enough new to say about Canadian-American relations during the Diefenbaker-Kennedy years to warrant a doctoral dissertation on the topic. But Asa McKercher’s Camelot and Canada: Canadian-American Relations in the Kennedy Era shows this view to be unfounded.

McKercher’s diplomatic history brings a fresh approach to a seemingly stale subject, in no small part because of the chronology he employs: looking at Canadian-American relations during the tenure of a president, rather than a prime minister. More specifically, the author focuses on bilateral relations during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, which makes this primarily a study of relations between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, with the Kennedy-Lester Pearson dyad putting in an appearance in an epilogue chapter. Given that the history of Canadian-American relations is almost exclusively written by Canadians, it is understandable that the narrative devices employed to this point have been the time frames of Canadian leaders. Granted, survey works on Canadian-American relations sometimes group the Diefenbaker and Pearson eras together, but the point is that revised time scales can provide different perspectives.¹

According to most interpretations, Diefenbaker’s policy towards the United States became increasingly erratic as the Prime Minister came unhinged in his last years in office, driven by his dislike for Kennedy and the need

¹ For example, Stephen Azzi argues in his recent historical survey of Canadian-American relations that the entire period from 1955 to 1968 was one characterized by discord, animated by rising anti-Americanism north of the border. Stephen Azzi, Reconcilable Differences: A History of Canada-Relations (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014).
to score votes. However, Diefenbaker’s incompetent behavior has often been balanced or rationalized by conten tions that Kennedy was also responsible for the deteriorating state of affairs since his imperious handling of Canada and Diefenbaker left the Prime Minister little other recourse short of just accepting American dictates.

_Camelot and Canada_ provides a more nuanced view of the Kennedy side of the equation. This book’s most noteworthy contribution is the portrayal of Kennedy as mostly pragmatic and patient with Canada, sensitive to and knowledgeable about Canadian nationalism. Moreover, McKercher’s reading of Kennedy contrasts not only with that of many Canadian commentators, but also with the dominant historiographical trends concerning Kennedy in American historiography. The book places the Canadian-American relationship within the broader context of Kennedy’s global foreign policy, which was made possible by an impressive array of research in different archives in various countries, including but not limited to Library and Archives Canada, a range of presidential libraries, and U.S. State Department records.

After the introduction, McKercher provides a chapter on the Dwight Eisenhower-Diefenbaker years, arguing that they were not as harmonious as is often supposed. However, this chapter is not simply a summary of existing scholarly literature, but is based heavily on primary source research. Indeed, a focused study of the Eisenhower era in Canadian-American relations would be most welcome.

The next chapter considers the early phase of the Kennedy-Diefenbaker era, covering the leaders’ two initial meetings in 1961 as well as their relations concerning global hot spots like Asia. Many historians identify Kennedy’s February 1961 visit to Ottawa as the point when things went sour, some putting most of the blame on the President. And, if not then, the summit a few months later sealed the deal, provoked by a laundry list of petty slights from both men. But McKercher shows that these tensions have been overblown, since the two leaders remained on cordial terms through 1961.

It is not uncommon for studies on Diefenbaker’s foreign policy to jump almost straight from the first half of 1961 to the Cuban Missile Crisis of October of 1962. However, there are a variety of events that are usually overlooked by Canadian historians, the most important of which is the aforementioned 1961 Berlin Wall Crisis. _Camelot and Canada_ spends a good chunk of a chapter dealing with the North American reaction to the establishment of the infamous _Berliner Mauer_. During this crisis, Diefenbaker authored a constructive and firm course that aided the American position, which contrasted sharply with the ensuing Cuban missile fiasco.

In fact, the Berlin Wall Crisis was the high water mark of the Diefenbaker-Kennedy relationship. During the crisis Diefenbaker was on the verge of taking the American nuclear warheads to which Canada had committed; it was not until afterward that he began to waffle. Still, due to Kennedy’s forbearance, in 1961 these weapons still had not impinged too significantly on the bilateral relationship. Rather, McKercher points to disputes in 1962 about the Grand Design (concerning the American relationship with western Europe) and Britain’s economic integration with Europe, combined with Kennedy’s attention to Pearson in the midst of a Canadian federal campaign. This led to Diefenbaker’s revelation that he possessed the infamous ‘push’ note – a briefing document for Kennedy left in the Prime Minister’s office which identified issues on which the

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president should “push” Diefenbaker – and this was the point of no return for a good personal relationship with Diefenbaker, as far as Kennedy, and McKercher, are concerned.

Then, of course, we have the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which is a sort of synecdoche for the wider Kennedy-Diefenbaker relationship. However, before getting into that diplomatic provocation, I would be remiss if I did not point out McKercher’s excellent condensed history of triangular Canada-U.S.-Cuba policies on offer, demonstrating that Kennedy was tolerant of Canada’s continued economic relationship with the island nation.

There have been several phases to the historiography on Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The first appeared within a decade after the crisis, and featured a mix of favourable and unfavourable assessments of Diefenbaker. Several works argue that Diefenbaker was right to delay so as not to blindly follow American unilateralism, and nationalist Canadians suggest that Kennedy practiced unnecessary brinkmanship. Peter Newman’s Renegade in Power appears to have been the first work to explicitly lay the blame for the mishandling of the situation on Diefenbaker’s inherent indecisiveness, which became conventional wisdom. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of biographies provided further detail. These were followed by studies such as Knowlton Nash’s effort on the Diefenbaker-Kennedy relationship, Basil Robinson’s record of Diefenbaker’s foreign policy, Peter Hayden’s monograph dedicated to the Canadian role in the crisis, and survey works by leading historians of Canadian-American relations.

The most prominent issue within Canadian historiography on Diefenbaker’s decision-making during the Cuban Missile Crisis has been his delay in authorizing a Canadian military alert and hesitant support for American policy. There are a range of hypotheses explaining Diefenbaker’s procrastination: Diefenbaker was deeply frustrated by the lack of consultation; the state of Canadian civil-military relations hampered the response; the Prime Minister was convinced that Kennedy had acted in haste; and/or Diefenbaker harboured a personal distaste for Kennedy. In his untrustworthy memoirs, Diefenbaker seems to have opted for a combination of the following explanatory reasons: Canada needed to contain the crisis; the United Nations should be given a central role in the crisis; fear and panic would have resulted in the Canadian public; and the Canadian dignity and sovereignty had to be protected, since Ottawa was not consulted by Washington.

In contrast to how it is usually portrayed, McKercher asserts that the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis was not the nadir of Canadian-American relations. Camelot and Canada contends that Diefenbaker hesitated to immediately provide clear support for Kennedy, but soon came to back the American position. This prevarication was mostly overlooked by the American establishment because Canada was inconsequential in


the heat of the moment, as were most other countries. This does suggest that the Prime Minister may have had some legitimate complaints about the lack of consultation, even though those should not have precluded supporting the American response, given the situation. Yet the Americans did notice Canada’s monitoring and intelligence assistance, as well as the fact that Canadian armed forces did go on alert right away (without Diefenbaker’s knowledge). Although Canadians took a more negative view of their leader’s indecisive behavior, McKercher concludes that the diplomatic relationship during the Cuban Missile Crisis was characterized by quiet cooperation.

Since it was not the bilateral contretemps it is usually made out to be, McKercher avers that the Cuban Missile Crisis had no substantive influence on the evolving nuclear warhead debacle. On that score, the Kennedy Administration’s response – namely, the press release after Diefenbaker’s January 1963 speech that seemed to simultaneously accept and reject a nuclear role – was justifiable giving Diefenbaker’s temporizing. While Kennedy probably did not know about the press release in advance, Camelot’s support for the Pearson campaign in the ensuing election “bordered on being reprehensible” (177).

When it comes to the deterioration of their relationship, McKercher generally gives Kennedy the benefit of the doubt, since he had to cope with an erratic and even duplicitous Diefenbaker. This excuses what seem to be instances of vindictive and arrogant behavior on Kennedy’s part during his last year in office. At the same time, McKercher allows that Diefenbaker did have to deal with some extremely difficult domestic questions concerning nuclear weapons, Canadian nationalism, a divided Cabinet, and public opinion. And sometimes the Prime Minister’s mistake was a lack of clear communication with Washington rather than outright perfidy.

McKercher provides a full portrait of the personal relationship between Diefenbaker and Kennedy. But he is also careful to put personality in its place, asserting that the many existing binational links, especially between diplomats in the U.S. State Department and Canadian Department of External Affairs (DEA), prevented problems at the top from working their way through other levels of the diplomatic and economic machinery, the Cuban Missile Crisis being case in point.

McKercher wades into some of the major debates and concepts concerning Canadian-American relations in the early Cold War. He contextualizes and analyzes the practice of quiet diplomacy, arguing that it remained the norm, though it increasingly failed to give Canada any influence over U.S. foreign policy. I also want to point out the respectful way that the author treats those he disagrees with, given how much of academia is prone to petty bickering and mudslinging (not unlike some of the chief protagonists in this book).

It is in that spirit of collegiality that I want to respectfully point out where I disagree. In particular, I have issues with the repeated invocation of the ‘special’ Canadian-American relationship from the start of the Cold War to the early 1970s. McKercher labels as myth the notion of a ‘golden age’ of Canada’s Department of External Affairs, but arguably simply puts a different hat on it by the way this ‘special relationship’ is characterized. Now, I am not opposed to the idea that in this period Canada and the United States had a unique relationship, even special; but I am hesitant to call it a special relationship if the definition is predicated on an absolute lack of linkage.

American refusal to supply Canada with grain-handling equipment (vacuators) because of these devices usage in Canadian wheat trade with communist China certainly seems an aborted attempt at linkage, albeit one where the U.S. backed down when it decided that the rewards were not worth the risks (62). An American
official tells Basil Robinson that Canada’s “record on defence policy would colour all dealings with US officials” (114)—how is that not linkage, or the threat of it? The diplomatic record in the early Cold War is full of euphemisms like ‘colour our relationship,’ ‘hurt Canada’s standing,’ or ‘threaten our mutual interests’—all meant to directly or subtly signal that dissatisfaction with a certain policy or action might well take the form of retribution elsewhere. Moreover, what is Diefenbaker’s “push” note if not an attempt at linkage, in this case by the weaker country (not to mention American threats about recriminations that would follow any public disclosure of the note)? Or take the American approach after Diefenbaker’s disastrous January 1963 speech about nuclear weapons. Along with the American response to the push note, the justifiability of the 1963 press release does not remove the fact that it was rife with linkage and unquiet diplomacy.

Because of Canada’s geographic position and economic importance, American officials did tolerate and humour Canadian sensitivities, probably more than with any other country. And diplomats in the DEA and Canadian experts in the State Department were keen to avoid linkage, especially on subjects where Canada’s approval was not vital to American interests. But that feeling was hardly shared by most other American officials and politicians. In the case of the attempt at an all-Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway earlier in the 1950s, members of Congress were among the loudest exponents of direct linkage, though diplomats and other administration officials also used soft and hard linkages to prevent an all-Canadian Seaway. Moreover, in many cases, East-Block officials obviated linkage situations in advance by stopping Canadian policy before it passed the point that Americans had signaled would result in retaliation, whether it be direct or indirect, subtle or blunt, soft or hard. Canadian officials knew that a tweak to American farm policies could have tremendous implications for Canadian grain prices and exports, to provide just one example. This is asymmetry at work or, to draw on former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s aphorism, the inevitable result of sleeping next to an elephant where any twitch is magnified tenfold on the bedfellow.

Claims that there was no linkage at all in the early Cold War require too much special pleading, and are not sustained by the historical record. Rather, this era was defined by a relative lack, but not a total absence, of linkage. Linkage was usually off the table when it was not likely to produce positive results proportional to the issue at hand, such as with the U.S. response to Canada imposing import surcharges during its 1962 balance-of-payments problems. But when Canadian policies or actions did threaten to have a significantly adverse impact on issues vital to the American national interest, particularly concerning national security, the United States was not afraid to apply pressure elsewhere—just as both governments detoured from the practice of quiet diplomacy when necessary.

5 If the argument is that there was no linkage whatsoever in the early Cold War period, then the case of the St. Lawrence Seaway alone disproves that argument, regardless of what takes place during the Diefenbaker-Kennedy era. Daniel Macfarlane, “‘Caught Between Two Fires’: St. Lawrence seaway and power project, Canadian-American relations, and linkage,” International Journal 67:2 (Summer 2012): 465-482.

6 A recent book that might have applicability to the Canadian-American historical relationship is Brantly Womack’s Asymmetry and International Relations. The author explores the ways in which weaker countries in asymmetrical international relationships can actually wield disproportionate power since the more powerful nation cannot enforce its preference at a cost acceptable to itself. Brantly Womack, Asymmetry and International Relationships (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1.
Outside of linkage, I think McKercher is absolutely right to stress the continuities in the Canadian-American relationship that persisted as leadership moved from St. Laurent to Diefenbaker to Pearson. As this book points out, there was already plenty of friction in Canadian-American relations prior to Diefenbaker, more than many historians acknowledge.7 In fact, the Cold War consensus in Canadian may have been breaking down even earlier than is often proposed, or may not have been as monolithic as we assume.

One can identify a ‘North American school’ of Canadian-American relations distinguished by the viewpoint that the common and constant interactions and transborder contacts are the stuff that really determine the binational relationship. This approach stresses the importance of shared continental outlooks and tendencies, and highlights cooperation—without obscuring conflict—between the two nations. Scholars within this school can perhaps be grouped according to their views about whether the professional diplomats were responsible for establishing the binational relationship with its ballast, or whether the bilateral relationship relied more on everyday social, cultural, and economic interactions. Either way, adherents of the North American school—even if they would not identify as such—contend that Canadian-American relations below the level of prime ministers and presidents give the relationship an inbuilt momentum, balance, and continuity. McKercher could certainly be grouped in this North American school, and this book stresses the role of the diplomatic machinery as the shock absorbers that cushioned the blows coming from the top.

I tend to think that pragmatic national interest has been a more important determinant in Canadian-American relations than notions of North American kinship. Shared cultural connections and understandings certainly grease the wheels, but mean little when vital strategic or economic considerations are at stake (as illustrated by the American Revolution, War of 1812, or American Civil War). Moreover, I would suggest that geography, environment, and proximity—e.g., sharing the Great Lakes, Rocky Mountains, and coast fisheries—are more important than cultural and heritage factors when it comes to explaining why Canadians and American have overlapping interests. Just consider how much of Canadian-American diplomacy has centered on shared environments, natural resources, and energy. From the Kennedy era issues like oil/gas pipelines and exports, or the Columbia River Treaty, have proven to be extremely important over the long term. In my opinion, environmental and energy diplomacy are among the most promising avenues for future research on the bilateral relationship.

This book is a good read. McKercher succeeds in telling a compelling story. The portrayal of Kennedy adds a significant new layer to this controversial period in North American diplomacy. The attention paid to the casual role of Canadian nationalism in the bilateral relationship is an obvious strength of this work, particularly the ways that diplomats at Foggy Bottom tolerated Canadian concerns about sovereignty and American encroachment. In answer to the classic question of whether Diefenbaker fell or was pushed, McKercher’s measured and thoughtful analysis concludes that though the Kennedy Administration might be guilty of manslaughter, it was in self-defence. Because of the emphasis on Kennedy and how Canadian-American relations fit into broader American foreign policy, this book will likely receive more attention from American scholars than is generally the case for studies of Canadian-American relations. And it is probably safe to say that this will become the standard work on the Diefenbaker-Kennedy relationship.

7 Stephen Azzi argues in his recent historical survey of Canadian-American relations that the entire period from 1955 to 1968 was one characterized by discord, animated by rising anti-Americanism north of the border. Stephen Azzi, Reconcilable Differences: A History of Canada-Relations (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014).
ne day in 1961, the Canada specialist of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research received an unusual telephone call. A voice he did not recognize asked for additional information about the economic dimensions of the U.S.-Canada relationship. Irritated and overworked, the analyst told the unknown caller to go through proper channels; he had to deal with more pressing projects. “I’m sorry I didn’t explain,” the caller replied patiently, “this is President Kennedy.”

Three decades later, in an oral history interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, retired diplomat Bruce Flatin recounted this episode as a testament to President John F. Kennedy’s attention to detail. It speaks as well to Kennedy’s willingness to circumvent the established chain of command. Above all, however, it demonstrates the special concern that the 35th President had for the complex, sensitive relationship his government had with its northern neighbor, the topic of Asa McKercher’s incisively researched, persuasively argued account.

McKercher, the author of numerous articles on Canadian foreign relations in the 1960s, focuses in depth on one of the most difficult phases in the modern history of Canadian-American ties: the relationship of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Prime Minister John George Diefenbaker. Spanning slightly over two years, the Kennedy-Diefenbaker period represented “a time of intense friction” in the bilateral relationship (3). Even as Canada and the United States worked to develop an integrated defensive system against atomic attack and to coordinate policy toward Cold War crises, they slipped inexorably away from each other, as a consequence of tectonic forces: American grand and regional designs on the one hand, and Canadian national sentiment on the other.

This is a well-wrought bilateral study; the structure neatly advances the narrative, while moving from topic to topic. Here, as elsewhere, the task of reevaluating the Kennedy era requires a close reconsideration of the Dwight D. Eisenhower years as well. McKercher usefully challenges the sharp distinctions drawn between the two administrations. Thunderheads appeared on the horizon long before Kennedy’s election. Diefenbaker rose to power in a 1957 electoral landslide while championing a form of Canadian nationalism that was, while not explicitly anti-American, wary of U.S. economic and cultural penetration, and protective of Canadian sovereignty. Canadian and American observers alike predicted trouble ahead.

Within this roundtable, I would like to focus specifically on how this book will contribute to the historiography of the Kennedy administration. The Canadian-American relationship in these years presented both states with a challenging and diverse set of problems. Very few other allies, perhaps only the United Kingdom, dealt with Washington on such a wide array of issues. It is, thus, all the more lamentable that major studies of the Kennedy administration and its foreign policy have not devoted significant attention to Canada.2

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While *Camelot and Canada* commands interest as a study of the bilateral relationship, it also deserves to be read amid other recent portraits of Kennedy. It strengthens an emerging consensus that the 35th President was altogether more cautious and cognizant of the limits of U.S. power and influence than was previously understood. McKercher paints a persuasive portrait of Kennedy in this policy realm; one that I find entirely recognizable. Kennedy understood the power, uses, and perils of nationalism. What is striking and particularly laudable about *Camelot and Canada* is that the author situates this awareness within the context of a well-established American alliance. Well before his election, Kennedy came to recognize that Canada had, in his words, “achieved a national strength and prestige which simply does not allow any portrayal of the country as an appendage of either Great Britain or the United States” (20).

Canadian independence had to be respected, and yet Ottawa’s cooperation was needed on a number of Cold War fronts. Notably, the global conflict served not to divide the two governments, but rather to offer them opportunities to exhibit solidarity. Ottawa and Washington, when not in accord on Cold War questions, consistently worked to develop compatible policies. The only serious disagreement between the two leaders during their first meeting in February 1961 concerned the sale of oil by a Canadian subsidiary of Standard Oil to ships transporting wheat to China. Here, Kennedy gave ground to Diefenbaker. Even as Canada traded openly with Cuba, Diefenbaker’s anti-Communism guided his response to Kennedy’s disastrous Bay of Pigs operation. His denunciations of the Fidel Castro regime offered Kennedy much-appreciated reassurance in the wake of his greatest failure. The Kennedy administration also found Canada generally helpful in its assigned role on the International Control Commission in Southeast Asia. During the Berlin crisis, Diefenbaker “stood stoutly with Kennedy” (97). Although the Cuban missile crisis overlapped the troubled final year of the relationship, Ottawa was largely supportive of its neighbor. Shared Cold War objectives buffered the relationship on more distant issues.

Hemispheric and economic questions, however, proved more difficult to resolve. Issues of trade and nuclear defense, each touching on questions of Canadian sovereignty, divided the two neighbors and led to the collapse of the relationship in the summer of 1962. Diefenbaker’s deepening ambivalence toward the acceptance of nuclear warheads for Boeing-Michigan Aeronautical Research Center (BOMARC) missiles undermined his credibility in Washington. More damaging in the immediate term, however, was the problem of accommodating Canada within the emerging trans-Atlantic Grand Design. The prospect of British entry in the European Economic Community threatened to undermine Canada’s preferential access as a Commonwealth member. U.S. efforts to promote a broader liberalization of cross-border and trans-Atlantic commerce elevated Canadian anxieties about Canada’s own identity and economic independence.


4 This strengthens McKercher’s argument that the interpersonal relationship was cordial at the outset, despite numerous accounts to the contrary.
When he hosted Liberal Party leader Lester Pearson in Washington in April 1962, Kennedy enraged Diefenbaker. In a 4 May 1962 meeting with U.S. Ambassador Livingston Merchant, the Prime Minister angrily produced a memorandum, written by presidential advisor Walt Rostow, that Kennedy had carelessly left behind in Ottawa the previous year, which spoke of “pushing” Canada on various issues (78). Henceforth, the relationship went off the rails. When Diefenbaker prevaricated publicly one final time on the BOMARC question, in January 1963, the State Department issued its own press release contradicting and undermining him. Although the White House was chastened by the subsequent uproar, Diefenbaker’s government collapsed, triggering an election that brought Lester Pearson to power.

This unhappy chapter in the bilateral relationship has received much attention already—virtually all of it from Canadian historians. The asymmetry of the U.S.-Canadian relationship—all-important to one partner and only sporadically so to the other—is unfortunately replicated within the historical profession. With that said, McKercher’s deep research in U.S. archives enables him to puncture some of the enduring myths about Diefenbaker’s fall. He is surely correct to doubt that General Lauris Norstad, whom Kennedy distrusted and had forced into retirement, was speaking on the administration’s behalf when he asserted that Canada had made a commitment to accept nuclear weapons (one event in the chain that led to Diefenbaker’s fall). Similarly, he casts justified doubt upon some of Diefenbaker’s more dramatic ex post facto tales of confrontations with Kennedy, and the more dramatic narratives of White House intervention in the 1963 Canadian election. Probably the most overt support Kennedy offered to Pearson was approving the involvement of Democratic Party pollster Lou Harris in support of the Liberal Party. Otherwise, he and his administration had the good sense to maintain a low profile.

McKercher does not place predominant emphasis on the mismatched personalities of Kennedy and Diefenbaker. Doing so would give short shrift to the powerful political, economic, and cultural factors at work on both sides of the border. Nevertheless, one cannot help being struck by the sense that poor interpersonal relations imposed a low ceiling. Kennedy could certainly carry a grudge, but Diefenbaker appears to have been cursed with an uncommon ability to conjure grievances out of thin air. An innocuous onetime mispronunciation of his last name by Kennedy, a dilatory reply by the President to a congratulatory telegram, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s expressed fondness for fishing trips to Canada: all of these things managed to irk the Prime Minister. He retained the lost Rostow memorandum, which he should have returned, while somehow convincing himself that its author remained influential in the Kennedy White House.

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5 On this point, see Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 300-302; and also Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 105-107. Norstad’s devotion to the NATO alliance provides a common thread between his forced retirement and his intervention into Canadian politics. He was intent on maintaining his autonomy as Supreme Allied Commander Europe, to the displeasure of the Kennedy administration. So, too, did he press Canada to meet its stated alliance commitments on his final official visit to Ottawa.

6 Rostow, by that point, had long since been reassigned from the National Security Council to the State Department’s Policy Planning Council where, in the words of his biographer, David Milne, “he could do less immediate damage.” David Milne, *America’s Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 99–104.
In contrast to the unsteady Diefenbaker, whose own indecision on nuclear questions was heightened by changing political calculations, the apparent degree of consensus within U.S. policymaking circles is striking. The State Department retained primary responsibility for policymaking, and many of its Canadianists carried over from the preceding administration. Canada policy does not appear to have generated the degree of acrimony, turf warfare, or even debate within the U.S. government as other questions. A study like this consequently challenges the overused characterization of the New Frontiersmen as crisis managers. Diefenbaker’s Canada presented long-term challenges, but ones best addressed through patient and quiet diplomacy. The heroes of this book, as such, are not the mismatched duo of Kennedy and Diefenbaker, but their diplomatic intermediaries.

Yet Camelot and Canada also exposes the element of inadvertency in Kennedy’s foreign policy. Much grief might have been averted if Kennedy—as frequent travelers are wont to do—had given Diefenbaker’s office one final glance before exiting it. Even more curious are the circumstances surrounding the State Department press release, which went out without Kennedy’s approval—in what National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy later called “an obvious error” (195). The President did not object afterward, but it is difficult to consider this hasty action, that contributed to the fall of an allied government, without thinking as well of a similar chain of events, later that year, in the case of South Vietnam. The American practitioners of quiet diplomacy ultimately had their breaking points, as did Kennedy’s national security system.

The great breadth of issues confronting Washington and Ottawa required and rewarded quiet diplomacy. Yet this same breadth poses the further question of whether the domestic politics of the two neighbors were not also ultimately entwined. Diefenbaker joked, during Kennedy’s May 1961 visit, “I hope that fellow never comes across the border and runs against me” (76). Yet real feeling surely lay behind the remark. Kennedy’s warmer, easier ties to Liberal Party leader Lester Pearson fueled Diefenbaker’s mounting suspicions, until the blowup. A Canadian newspaper described Pearson as returning from his April 1962 trip with “a sprinkling of new frontier political gold-dust” (131). Although McKercher lays emphasis elsewhere, the natural tendency of Liberals, Democrats, Conservatives, and Republicans alike to prefer dealing with their counterparts is also pertinent—and not at all limited to the early 1960s.

This well-researched, persuasive study serves as a reminder that the United States—then and now—has few relationships as multifaceted as that which it shares with its northern neighbor. Americans, alas, have spent far less time pondering this distinct bond than have Canadians. They ought to pay closer attention.
should like to begin by thanking Tom Maddux and Diane Labrosse of H-Diplo for setting up and preparing the roundtable, Mike Carroll for his précis, and the four reviewers for their insightful commentary on my book. Both as scholars and colleagues, I deeply respect Stephen Azzi, Jack Cunningham, Daniel Macfarlane, and Robert Rakove, and so I am delighted to receive their feedback, particularly as it is so positive. Indeed, given their warm words, there is little to which I feel I should respond, other than to emphasize my hope that Americans will read this book and be prompted to take Canada-U.S. relations more seriously. Canadians are wont to make this point, but happily it is one made too by Rakove in his review.

Readers of the roundtable will note one area of disagreement between Macfarlane and myself: the issue of linkage and the wider matter as to whether a special relationship exists between Canada and the United States, or at least between Ottawa and Washington. I have known Dan since our grad school days together in Ottawa (I count him as a friend and fellow Dief-enthusiast), I knew that this issue would be a point of difference between us, I take his point, and I doubt very much whether either of us will agree with the other. While no doubt I am expected to play my assigned role and sally forth to defend my interpretation, it seems to me that far too much time is wasted by historians on questions, which are, simply put, academic. On the issue of linkage, suffice it to say that I believe in a difference between threat and action. Furthermore, what one historian might read as a threat can be better interpreted as a helpful warning or even lament, particularly when a diplomat is referring to actions that might inflame public or legislative opinion and thereby complicate the practice of diplomacy. And given the interdependent nature of Canada-US interaction, the United States Congress is particularly well-placed to complicate matters.1 As for specialness, beyond the absence of actual (as opposed to threatened) linkage, I think there is something to the notion if only to describe the depth and breadth of Canadian and American interaction on everything from intelligence-sharing to trans-boundary water management (IR theorists Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye’s complex interdependence), the lack of genuine animosity (faculty clubs notwithstanding), and a shared and generally cooperative—or at least sympathetic—worldview (though now we enter the age of President Donald Trump). Admittedly the term ‘special relationship’ may be semantically lazy, but it’s where I’ll hang my hat.

As none of the reviewers criticized me for it, I should like to raise one small failing myself: my lack of attention to French Canadian opinion. I do indeed ignore Québec; so too did American officials, who began to pay serious attention to Québécois nationalism only in the mid to late 1960s. While Camelot and Canada is fundamentally about U.S. foreign policy toward Canada, I spend considerable time looking at Canadian reactions to American moves, whether in Cuba or Berlin, or on the question of nuclear weapons, and I overlooked Québécois viewpoints. Je suis désolé.

To conclude, again I thank Azzi, Cunningham, Macfarlane, and Rakove for their reviews and for taking the time to read and comment upon my study. It is gratifying to know that at least four people (plus my mum, dad, and a copyeditor) read it.

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