Origins and Evolution of the North American Stable Peace

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Abstract and Keywords

Interstate relations among the North American countries have been irenic for so long that the continent is often assumed to have little if anything to contribute to scholarly debates on peaceful change. In good measure, this can be attributed to the way in which discussions of peaceful change often become intertwined with a different kind of inquiry among international relations scholars, one focused upon the origins and denotative characteristics of "pluralistic security communities." Given that it is generally (though not necessarily accurately) considered that such security communities first arose in Western Europe, it is not difficult to understand why the North American regional-security story so regularly takes an analytical back seat to what is considered to be the far more interesting European one. This article challenges the idea that there is little to learn from the North American experience, inter alia by stressing three leading theoretical clusters within which can be situated the scholarly corpus of works attempting to assess the causes of peaceful change on the continent. Although the primary focus is on the Canada–US relationship, the article includes a brief discussion of where Mexico might be said to fit in the regional-security order.

Keywords: peaceful change, stable peace, pluralistic security community, North American security, democratic peace theory, realist peace theory, exceptionalism

The story has it that as he was leaving the federal constitutional convention that had gathered in Philadelphia midway through 1787 to design a new political framework for the fledgling American republic, Benjamin Franklin was asked what he and the other delegates had brought into existence through their heated deliberations. Franklin's cautionary response: "A republic—if you can keep it" (McHenry [1787] 1906, 618). So, too, might

If ever there has been a regional embodiment par excellence of the phenomenon of peaceful change in international relations, it has been the North American continent north of the Rio Grande, even if not too many scholars of international relations appear to realize this. Indeed, it is regularly assumed that the distinction of being first and foremost

ploys the same concept, union denotes the highest stage of stable peace, one in which the interacting states participate in the shaping of a new identity through the process of “narrative generation,” meaning that elites in one state can no longer quite see those in the other as being fundamentally different from themselves, in matters appertaining to the defense of North America. This is why he says that in a theoretical sense, the iterative construction of stable peace starts in realism (rapprochement engendered by restraint), goes through liberalism (security community), and finishes in constructivism (collective identity) (Kupchan 2010, 52).

The two northernmost states of North America pioneered the frontier of this kind of peaceful change in international relations. Whether what they managed to accomplish could be replicated elsewhere in the international system has long been a question that has animated a great deal of policy discussion, especially upon the part of enthusiasts who saw in the “North American idea” a promising remedy to interstate conflict in other, less fortunate, regions, at a time U0ra great deal o74 TmDÐRr 0 0 0.75st dealiniseat deal of policy di

ated with military alliance and deep, comprehensive security and defense cooperation. Both versions assume the existence of security community, but for the maximalist variant, something further is on offer—a high level of security integration between sovereign states, generating a security "narrative" that shapes the quality of their mutual relations in a manner not found in the minimalist variant. This is why, in the Canada–US context,

ties. Let us take them in reverse order, starting with this last-named explanatory grouping.

Among this grouping, no one has done more than Stéphane Roussel to focus our attention upon the second-image, and liberal, source of continental peaceful change. Sounding almost like Gertrude Stein, save that he comes to *praise* Oakland not to dispraise it, Roussel assures us that the theoretical basis of the North American zone of peace is not to be found *there*, but rather in Europe; in short, from the standpoint of "exceptionalism," there really *was* no there, there, in North America. For the answer to the question, why did war, or even threats of war, disappear from the northern half of North America, Roussel turns to democratic peace theory, as developed and refined by European thinkers, including though hardly restricted to Immanuel Kant himself. Not just the institutional constraints identified and touted by Kant ([1795] 1991; Doyle 1986; Waltz 1962), but even more importantly the *normative* ones that featg n n ptvlitn

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tural change that occurred in the relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom at the tail end of the nineteenth century, the moment of the two English-speaking powers' "great rapprochement" (Perkins 1968; Rock 1989).

According to this version of events, peaceful change on the North American continent (north of the Rio Grande) required first and foremost a resolution of the long-running political contestations between the United Kingdom and the United States. Scholars continue to debate why and how Britain and the United States ceased to be such mutual antagonists on the North American continent (Vucetic 2011; Hitchens 2004). But that they managed to bury the hatchet, no one denies. And since Canada at this time remained, in matters appertaining to foreign policy, very much a component of the British state, it follows that one can claim the onset of peaceful change in North America to have been part and parcel of the British willingness to "accommodate," for *whatever* reason(s), America's rise to great-power status (Schake 2017). Thus, the balance-of-power explanation, say many analysts, is ultimately the most satisfactory one, if we want to know how and why peaceful change "broke out" in North America. Because, to those who think this way, any risk of another Anglo-American war evaporated with the rapprochement, it followed that so too must the risk of any further Canada–US conflict have dissipated.

A refinement of the realist explanation became necessary once it proved no longer possible, or even polite, to interpret Canada–US relations in the context of Anglo-American relations, say, sometime during the interwar period. Again, recourse has been had by the realist school to balance-of-power formulations, only this time what was being emphasized was a function much more of *imbalance* than of balance, properly considered, and the rationality in decision making held to be derivative of such imbalance. The argument of the peace-through-imbalance school was a simple one: a war between the United States and Canada was precluded by the lopsided structure of the regional international system (Lennox 2009). Because the United States was so much more powerful than Canada, it made no sense for the former to think of waging war against the latter, as there could be no realistic threat to its physical security stemming from the north sufficiently grave to warrant violent response, therefore why waste time and resources worrying

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