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# On guard for thee: global citizenship and Canada-U.S. relations

Canadians have a chance to gain more ground in the UN Security Council seat race by sharply contrasting our values with the current American political leadership; a growing divergence that is notable.



U.S. President Donald Trump, left, and International Development Minister Karina Gould. In February, Trump proposed slashing 21 per cent of foreign aid, while Canada recently quietly announced \$159.5-million in humanitarian aid to a plethora of worthy organizations. *White House photograph by Andrea Hanks, The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

**OPINION (/OPINION/)** | BY [ERIKA SIMPSON](https://www.hilltimes.com/ht_author/erika-simpson/), [MICHAEL SIMPSON](https://www.hilltir)

To suggest the United States would station troops along the longest undefended border in the world slashed a psychological wound between Canada and the United States. COVID-19 shut the Canada-U.S. border down, but it was the speed with which leaders of historically friendly countries agreed to go their separate ways that left indelible scars.

Under the pressure of a tiny virus, our paths are diverging; our common border is widening. As our economies strain and our health-care systems are tested, the world cannot help but bear witness to our growing divisions. Statistically, the political philosophy of “me first” is losing.

According to Worldometer, more than 95,000 people (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>) in the United States have succumbed to the virus, as of May 21. Public opinion in the U.S. is

marked by negative ratings and political divisions, with few having confidence in the president.

(<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/12/politics/cnn-poll-federal-government-handling-of-coronavirus/index.html>), Canada has lost more than 6,100 souls. A considerably smaller rate of 126 fewer people per million. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's popularity has increased dramatically in the polls, with almost two-thirds of Canadians approving of his handling of the virus. (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-trudeau-covid-world-leaders-1.5511464>)

Liberal internationalism and an evidence-based “feminist” approach, marked by co-operation and level-headed thinking is winning the day—and not just in Canada.

Canada-U.S. relations are being judged in the courts of domestic and international public opinion. In February, Donald Trump proposed slashing 21 per cent of foreign aid. Canada quietly announced \$159.5-million (<https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/04/backgrounder---canada-provides-funding-to-address-covid-19-pandemic.html>) in humanitarian aid to a plethora of worthy organizations, like the Red Cross and UNICEF, followed by a \$600-million pledge to Gavi (<https://www.gavi.org/news/media-room/canada-commits-cad-600-million-gavi>), the Vaccine Alliance.

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In the midst of a pandemic, Trump withheld more than US\$400-million from the World Health Organization (<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/15/834666123/trump-and-who-how-much-does-the-u-s-give-whats-the-impact-of-a-halt-in-funding>), claiming a Chinese bias. Canada paid our dues and then

voluntarily increased our contribution by millions.

(<https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/04/backgrounder---canada-provides-funding-to-address-covid-19-pandemic.html>),

While Trump threatened to ban the export of personal protective equipment, including to his neighbours in Canada, our Minister of International Development, Karina Gould, stepped up to help convene the international Group of Friends on Food and Nutrition Security. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2020/04/minister-gould-to-participate-in-meeting-on-food-security-and-nutrition-during-the-covid-19-crisis.html>), confronting the growing international fear of a global “hunger pandemic.”

This is an additional pandemic, catalyzed by the virus, that the head of the World Food Programme warns (<https://insight.wfp.org/wfp-chief-warns-of-hunger-pandemic-as-global-food-crises-report-launched-3ee3edb38e47>) could kill 300,000 people per day of the world’s increasing poor (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/impact-of-covid19-coronavirus-economic-global-poverty/>). Perhaps most indicative of America’s growing isolation and Canada’s increasing solidarity in the community of nations, was the recent proposal at the UN Security Council proposing a ceasefire (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/un-ceasefire-resolution-us-blocks-who>) for all nations to stop armed conflict and all fighting while humanity faces the common threat of COVID-19. It was an international call for common sense, in which the U.S. was the lone voice of opposition by blocking the vote.

COVID-19 is a global threat and, in the words of Gould, we will not be able to rest until it is wiped out in every corner of the globe.

Our path forward for health, well-being, and a virus-free world is linked to many of the other global challenges we face, such as poverty, food security, human security, and climate change.

None of these global challenges can be tackled alone.

Ironically, the very path forward to future resilience has been eloquently laid out in an agreed-upon plan called Agenda 2030, which describes 17 interlinked sustainable development goals (SDGs) we must accomplish in the coming decade.

The secretary-general of the United Nations has appealed for “accelerated” change in the coming “Decade of Action” on Agenda 2030. (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>) It is a common path forward, which desperately needs world leaders whose vocabulary champions the words “together” and “solidarity,” versus “me, first” and “us/them.”

Canadians uphold values like working together—mantras that have become the approved working language of today’s federal government speeches and press releases.

A digital Movement Map (<http://www.bccic.ca/map>) of Canadian organizations identifies almost 12,000 civil society groups in that work on the SDGs, the internationally agreed-upon way forward to a resilient common future. It is an astounding number and proof of our solidarity.

Nowhere is leadership needed more than at the Security Council of the United Nations where global security concerns are hotly debated.

Prime Minister Trudeau is competing with Norway and Ireland for only two elected seats this year. Norway and Ireland are both generous donors when it comes to international aid and co-operation.

Former Liberal prime minister Lester Pearson originally set the agreed-upon standard of 0.7 per cent of gross national product (now gross national income) as the bar nations should aspire to. Norway is exceeding it and Ireland is far ahead of Canada.

Despite Canada’s duly lauded Feminist International Assistance Policy, our measure of international development aid was, and still is, distinctly lagging, at approximately 0.28 per cent GNI.

Canadians share a global identity marked by international co-operation and concrete actions that cherish global citizenship. In the coming weeks, before the official secret vote among UN ambassadors takes place in June (or perhaps in the fall, due to the pandemic creating lags in UN voting procedure), Canadians have a chance to gain more ground on the Irish (whose peacekeeping record is stellar) and the Norwegians (whose financial contributions to development are unparalleled) by sharply contrasting our values with the current American political leadership; a growing divergence that is notable.

It is time for Canada—with our feminist, internationalist leadership, and caring international reputation—to sit across the Security Council table facing the U.S., China, and Russia and speak up strongly for a better world. A world that is surely listening.

*Erika Simpson is an associate professor of international politics at Western University, president of the Canadian Peace Research Association, and author of NATO and the Bomb. Michael Simpson is the executive director of the British Columbia Council for International Co-operation.*

*The Hill Times*

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