

We have energy, the U.S. can defend us

A compelling dynamic increasingly is at play in Canada-U.S. relations: Symbiosis.

The United States is going to find itself more and more beholden to Canada for energy supplies, as Canada has always leaned on Uncle Sam for military protection.

Not a bad arrangement, when you think about it.

The U.S. is the world's greatest military power and its defensive shield, built in its own best interest, has been designed to protect the continent.

Why would we spend billions when we couldn't hope to defend ourselves against the Americans, and the Americans would protect northern soil from any outside invader?

To be sure, in saving on military spending, we have certainly expended some political capital; there has been a psychological price to pay in that the U.S. has always resented Canada for freeloading on its defence capacity.

Former U.S. ambassador to Canada Paul Cellucci went so far as to say so in 2005, when he publicly urged this country to start investing in its own military.

A just-published book by former MP David Kilgour and Washington insider David Jones, more precisely describes the American attitude: "It regrets that the Canadian response to our traditional defence/security relationship is a combination of veiled hostility and indifference."

But in their book *Uneasy Neighbo(u)rs: Canada, the USA and the Dynamics of State, Industry and Culture*, the two authors point to a reason the Americans should now start feeling a special obligation toward Canada.

Canada is the largest energy exporter to the U.S., a situation not without its difficulties for this country.

"One of the most obvious challenges," Kilgour and Jones write, "is the tension between energy use and conservation." They note that Canadians are largely supportive of the Kyoto Protocol to address climate change, while Americans -- perennial worshippers of the single occupancy vehicle -- are less so.

The book looks at disparate approaches the two countries have taken across a whole range of policy areas, touching on the usual chestnuts -- health care, culture, national identity, crime.

Disappointingly, the authors fail to fully explore the evolving scratch-my-back dimension of the Canada-U.S. bond, with respect to 'their' military power and 'our' energy stash.

But the book correctly observes: "As investment in oil sands production continues to increase output, Canada's importance to Americans as a secure and rule-of-law-respecting supplier of oil will continue to grow.

"This is especially so in light of the fact that so much of the world's current oil supply is located in politically unstable or potentially unstable regions of the world."

The fact is, energy demands in the U.S. continue to flourish as the domestic supply of conventional oil shrinks. The Yanks currently import 58 per cent of their oil requirements.

Doubtless, Canada is happy to have an eager customer for its energy resources. But increasingly, people are becoming aware of how terribly polluting the process is of extracting oil from Alberta 's tar sands. (The tar sands have lately been renamed "the oilsands," no doubt for PR purposes.)

So, there clearly is an element of sacrifice involved on both sides of the border. The Americans can resent Canada for failing to spend sufficiently on its own armed forces, leaving them to pay the freight. And Canadians now can resent Americans for their energy profligacy and reliance on the polluting tar sands.

Of course it may be argued that it's foolhardy for Canada to depend on the U.S. for defence because the U.S. military really looks after American interests.

But it may also be argued that it's dumb for the Americans to keep slurping oil from Canada when carbon emissions are causing such environmental problems for everyone, Americans included.

The deepening dependence between the two countries certainly makes for interesting discussion.

Is it possible that Americans will come to pay greater heed to Canada?

In appreciation of our energy largesse, will there be more understanding and less expectation from Americans when it comes to asking Canada for defence contributions?

Unquestionably, the dynamic between the two countries will shift in this new era of peak oil.

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