

A Red Tory in Foreign Affairs: Analyzing John G. Diefenbaker's Foreign Policies from an Ideological Perspective

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Introduction

The foreign policies that John Diefenbaker pursued were, and continue to be, sources of great controversy. His detractors viewed him as indecisive, driven by rabid anti-Americanism and prone to flip flopping on policy decisions.¹ They viewed his foreign policies as foolish and containing contradictory elements. Books that examined Diefenbaker included chapters called the “Folly of the Diefenbaker years.”² Yet, when placed in the ideological context of Diefenbaker's red tory beliefs, a different narrative emerges. In this narrative, Diefenbaker's foreign policies display a remarkable consistency and decisiveness and seemingly irreconcilable elements are no longer that. An examination of his refusal to join the Organization of American States (OAS), his decision to maintain relationships with Cuba following the Cuban Revolution and his actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis reveal that some of Diefenbaker's most important, and controversial, policy decisions were consistent with his red tory beliefs.

Red Tory Foreign Policy

To argue that Diefenbaker was deeply influenced by his red toryism is to presuppose at least two very important things. First that red toryism actually exists and second, that Diefenbaker was in fact a red tory. There is certainly no universal agreement on either of these points.³ The purpose of this paper, however, is not to continue the debate about these two issues, rather it is to move forward with the assumption that red toryism as defined by Gad Horowitz and others existed and that Diefenbaker is a modern example of this ideological phenomenon.⁴ According to proponents of the existence of red toryism such as George Grant and Ron Dart, a red tory like Diefenbaker would fear that the influence of the largely liberal US will overwhelm Canada's tory and socialist fragments and thus the traditionally Liberal Party view of intimate relations with the US rejected must be rejected.⁵ Crucially, however, red toryism is not synonym for anti-Americanism. It is not that red torys hate or even dislike the US, rather it is the concern over the influence of the US on Canada that underlines their foreign policy beliefs. The primary goal of a red tory is to create more autonomy for Canada in foreign affairs. It is, in other words, Canadian nationalism rather than anti-Americanism that is the most important influence.

¹ See Peter C. Newman, Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years (Toronto: MacClelland and Stewart, 1963); Patrick Nicholson, Vision and Indecision (Don Mills: Longmans Canada, 1968); Jamie Glazov, Canadian Policy toward Khrushchev's Soviet Union (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

² Jack Granatstein, Who Killed the Canadian Military? (Toronto: HarperFlamingo, 2004).

³ For a quick summary of the debate see Rod Preece, “The Myth of the Red Tory” Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory (Spring-Summer, 1977): 3-28 and Gad Horowitz, “Notes on ‘Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada’” Canadian Journal of Political Science (June, 1978): 383-399.

⁴ Gad Horowitz, “Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation” Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Studies (May, 1966): 143-171. Charles Taylor, Radical Torys: The Conservative Tradition in Canada (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006). Ron Dart, The Red Tory Tradition: Ancient Roots, New Routes (Dewdney, B.C.: Synaxis Press, 1999).

⁵ George Grant, Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989). Dart, The Red Tory Tradition.

Diefenbaker demonstrated this focus on Canadian nationalism and autonomy in three different situations; his decision to not join the OAS, his maintenance of Canadian-Cuban relations following the latter's turn towards communism and his initially refusal to offer complete and total support to the US government at the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In all three situations, various authors have argued that Diefenbaker was driven by a deep anti-American sentiment but in reality, it was his deep commitment to Canadian nationalism as defined by red toryism that was the most important influence.

Diefenbaker and the OAS

Between 1960 and 1962, Diefenbaker almost led Canada into the OAS and then ultimately rejected membership. His approach to the question of OAS membership reflected his determination that Canada should keep a respectful distance from the United States (US) on foreign policy questions, in short, his search for greater autonomy for Canada. The usefulness of membership in the OAS measured in relation to this larger foreign policy goal, shifted in response to pressure emanating from various Latin American countries and the US

Diefenbaker initially continued Canada's long standing policy of non-membership despite Latin American nations pressure to join. Diefenbaker feared that Canada would inevitably be faced with the tough choice of supporting US policies over the objections of Latin American nations or siding with the latter against the US. He viewed the OAS as a no-win situation. Furthermore, the US relationship with Latin America had become quite volatile in the 1950s. Anti-American sentiment in the region was growing, as demonstrated by the riots that greeted Vice-President Richard Nixon in Venezuela. With his concern about the dangers of being caught in the middle between the US and Latin American countries, Diefenbaker initially saw little opportunity for the advancement of Canadian interests in joining the OAS.

By 1959 Diefenbaker had a new External Affairs Minister, Howard Green, whose views not only complemented his own but who had some influence on him. It is worthy of note that Green shared many of Diefenbaker's beliefs concerning Canadian nationalism.⁶ In many ways Diefenbaker gave Green more freedom in shaping Canada's foreign relations than his predecessor Sidney Smith and the new Minister was a strong proponent of strengthening Canadian autonomy.⁷ He was also a strong supporter of Canadian membership in the OAS.⁸ With Green offering support and Diefenbaker more comfortable with foreign affairs, and exhibiting a greater willingness to move in new directions, the Prime Minister was greatly influenced by a trip to Mexico he undertook in 1960.

During the trip, he publically spoke at a number of events of how the current climate of international affairs was pushing Canada towards a greater involvement in Latin America and bringing Canada and Mexico closer together.⁹ His statements reflected his view that Canada was trapped by the Cold War and its ties to the US. Historian Jamie Glazov has argued that Diefenbaker's anti-communist and anti-American ideas were contradictory and paralyzed his government. The reality is that his anti-communism and concern about the overwhelming

⁶ Grant, 23.

⁷ Transcribed Oral Interview of Howard Green by Jack Granatstein. Produced by the York University's Institute for Behavioural Research, copy in the Vancouver City Archives, Howard Green Papers, Box MSS 903, Volume 605 D-1, File 2, 25.

⁸ Heath Macquarrie, *Red Tory Blues: A Political Memoir* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 296.

⁹ Text of Speech given by John G. Diefenbaker in Mexico City, April 22nd, 1960. DCCA, Prime Minister's Office Series, Vol. 258, File 313.45, 210665-7.

influence of the US were not contradictory at all.¹⁰ In fact these views led him to seek alternative areas for trade and political support, particularly in Latin America. The climate of international affairs was pushing Canada and Mexico closer together.

In private meetings between Diefenbaker and Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos the two men developed a strong relationship and discussed Canada's greater involvement in the OAS. Later, Mexico's Foreign Minister, Manuel Tello expressed Mexico's hope that Canada would end its self-imposed isolation and join.¹¹ López then echoed Tello's comments and pressed Diefenbaker to tangibly bring Canada more fully into the inter-American sphere. On his return home from Mexico it appeared that Diefenbaker had made up his mind to bring Canada into the OAS. He wrote two memoranda. In the first he stated, "that the advantages of joining the organization outweigh the disadvantages."¹² He offered a more nuanced interpretation in his second memo when he discussed the Latin American economies and their potential for growth, stating that "the OAS symbolizes a new world and emphasizes the need of American solidarity." He felt that "the only interpreter to the Commonwealth of this new realignment in power in the Western Hemisphere is Canada being associated with the OAS"¹³

The most interesting comment was perhaps the connection made between the Commonwealth and the OAS. In addition to promoting Canadian autonomy, red torys in the immediate post-1945 period also sought to maintain ties to Great Britain and the Commonwealth. Thus, Diefenbaker sought to increase Canada's role and autonomy in the world and both he and Green saw the Commonwealth as a vehicle to do this; it was Green's belief that Canada would surpass Britain, France and West Germany in terms of its influence on the world before the end of the century.¹⁴ Joining the OAS would not only expand Canada's role in the region but allow Canada to strengthen its position as an influential leader in the Commonwealth.

By 1962, however, Diefenbaker effectively changed his mind. It culminated with the OAS suspending Cuba on January 22nd, 1962, a move that could be traced to US pressure and brought US policy into conflict with Canada's. The suspension of Cuba made clear the potential for Canadian-US conflict if Canada joined the organization. Viewing Kennedy as a dangerous leader (something which will be discussed in greater detail below), Diefenbaker began to think that joining the OAS was not in Canada's best interests.

Diefenbaker's reassessment of membership began with Kennedy's visit to Ottawa in 1961. During his address to Parliament the President, with no advance notice to Diefenbaker, publicly called upon Canada to join the organization. Diefenbaker was furious. Kennedy's reiteration of his public call in a private meeting with Diefenbaker only made matters worse. Diefenbaker later informed the Cabinet that in response he had told Kennedy that "in light of the

¹⁰ Jamie Glazov, Canadian Policy toward Khrushchev's Soviet Union (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 170

¹¹ Record of Conversation between John G. Diefenbaker and Manuel Tello, April 22nd, 1960. DCCA, Prime Minister's Office Series, Vol. 73, File 313.45, 64739.

¹² John G. Diefenbaker, "Memorandum", April 24th, 1960. DCCA, Personal and Confidential Series, Vol. 572, File 890, 434429.

¹³ John G. Diefenbaker, "Memorandum re. Organization of American States", April 24th, 1960. DCCA, Personal and Confidential Series, Vol. 572, File 890, 434430.

¹⁴ Howard Green, "Canadian-American Assembly" A Review of John Sloan Dickey's The United States and Canada for the Globe and Mail. City of Vancouver Archives, Howard Green Papers, Box MSS 903, Vol. 605 F-5, File 9, 4.

unsettling events in Cuba, Guatemala, Ecuador, Brazil and British Guiana ... Canada was not prepared to become a full member at this time.”¹⁵

It seemed to be the pressure applied by the US was decisive in turning Diefenbaker against the idea of OAS membership for Canada. But more specifically, it was Kennedy's overt attempts in both public and private to pressure Diefenbaker that ultimately changed his mind on the issue. He was not driven by anti-Americanism. He did not reject membership simply because the US requested it. Washington had been requesting it for nearly two decades so Kennedy's request in 1961 was hardly new. Rather, it was the distasteful manner in which the request was made by Kennedy and the evidence that acquiescence to a request made in this manner would hurt, rather than promote Canadian autonomy .

If there were any lingering doubts about the government's position on the OAS, they were erased by the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Diefenbaker was deeply offended at being left out of the decision-making process and being informed of the nuclear weapons in Cuba only hours before Kennedy's public announcement¹⁶ Kennedy's reaction to Canadian actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the pressure from Washington to accept nuclear weapons demonstrated conclusively to Diefenbaker that it was very difficult for Canada to navigate a line between Latin American and US interests. The primary argument against Canadian membership in the OAS, that Canada could become caught between the US and Latin America, was now overwhelming. Membership had perhaps been a possibility when Diefenbaker's good friend "Ike", Dwight D. Eisenhower, was President but certainly not with the young, brash Kennedy. Thus, Diefenbaker's view of membership in the OAS had come full circle.

Diefenbaker's handling of the OAS question has often been used to demonstrate his inability to follow through on a policy objective, or to illustrate the depths of his anti-Americanism. The former explanation is inaccurate and the latter is overly simplistic. US actions and pressure may have played a pivotal role in Diefenbaker's decisions with regard to the OAS but it was not an anti-American bias that determined his position. Kennedy's insensitivity on the issue infuriated him, but it was not the primary factor in his decision. When it appeared that membership would be advantageous to Canada and would open more opportunities for Canadian trade and political influence in Latin America, Diefenbaker began to contemplate it. But when it became apparent that Canada would be placed in an awkward position where, in certain instances, it would have to decide between supporting the leader of the western world and countries with which it strongly wanted to conduct business, he rejected the idea.

Diefenbaker and the Cuban Revolution

On January 1st, 1959, long time US ally and Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista, fled Cuba. This marked the victory of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. At this point Cuba began a slow movement towards communism, a movement which accelerated as relations with the US deteriorated. Eventually, relations between the Cuban and US government were completely severed and the US sought the support of its allies in its conflict with that country. Diefenbaker refused to sever relations with Cuba or join an US-led economic embargo against the island state.

At first, there were few problems with Batista's successor. Canada and the US, as well as most of the nations of the world, quickly recognized the new Cuban government as legitimate

¹⁵ "Organization of American States – Canadian Position" Cabinet Conclusion, May 23rd, 1961. RG 2, Series A-5-a, Vol. 6176, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 287.

and relations continued as before. Yet Castro rapidly wore out his welcome with the US government, as his consolidation of power coincided with mass arrests and executions. Far worse, however, was his acceptance of the Cuban Communist Party as a legitimate political entity and his slow turn towards the Soviet bloc for support.

Despite these actions and the deteriorating Cuba-US relationship, little changed in terms of the Canada-Cuba relationship during the early months of the Revolution. Canada had a history of trade with non-allied and communist nations and thus, as far Diefenbaker was concerned, the movement of the Cuban Revolution towards Communism was not a *de facto* cause for any immediate change in the relationship.

The situation deteriorated when the Castro regime began to nationalize the means of production in Cuba.¹⁷ It was the beginning of a sharp turn towards a communist economic system and presaged a confrontation with the US. In 1960, the US enacted an economic blockade of Cuba. The US expected its allies and in particular Canada, to support the blockade. Diefenbaker was now faced with the critical decision of whether or not Canada should join the embargo. In the end, he compromised. He moved to prevent US companies from circumventing the embargo, by shipping goods to Cuba through Canada and by agreeing to join an embargo on strategic goods. However, he refused to join the larger commercial embargo, despite the request coming his friend, US President Dwight Eisenhower.

Eisenhower attempted to influence Diefenbaker's Cuban policies during the first three years of the Cuban Revolution. The manner in which this was done explains why the two leaders never had serious differences over Cuba. Diefenbaker's abiding respect for the US position during the Eisenhower presidency helps to discredit the argument that Diefenbaker was fundamentally anti-American. He had first seen Eisenhower in person at the 1952 Republican Convention in Chicago.¹⁸ He remembered how the Republicans at the convention had admired Eisenhower's opponent, Senator Robert A. Taft, but had loved Eisenhower. He had himself been swept along by the outpourings of emotion at the convention.

The two leaders formally met just over five years later during Diefenbaker's first visit to Washington in 1957. He was as impressed with Eisenhower in person as he had been on stage at the 1952 convention. There was, according to Diefenbaker, "no limit to Mr. Eisenhower's congeniality" and he left Washington with the feeling that "Canada's position was more clearly understood."¹⁹ They built on this promising beginning and continued to have an excellent relationship, referring to each other as "John" and "Ike" in their correspondence, until Eisenhower left office in 1960.

Eisenhower often communicated with Diefenbaker on a personal level in both meetings and through correspondence. This created in Diefenbaker feelings of personal importance and convinced him that Eisenhower took the Canada-US relationship seriously. During the Cuban Revolution, Eisenhower sought to bring Diefenbaker around to the US viewpoint with one of his personal letters, in which he stated, "We are facing a very serious situation in the Caribbean

¹⁷ Jorge Dominguez, "Cuba since 1959" in *Cuba: A Short History* Leslie Bethell (ed.), (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁸ Diefenbaker, *One Canada. Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker: Vol. I: The Crusading Years, 1895 to 1956*, 251.

¹⁹ Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker* (Toronto, Canada: Macfarlane Walter and Ross, 1995), 270.

which is obviously inviting Soviet penetration of the Western Hemisphere.”²⁰ He then went on to invite Diefenbaker to express his views on the subject.

It was a telling example of the differences between the manner in which Eisenhower and his successor, John F. Kennedy, dealt with Diefenbaker. Eisenhower had a long history of dealing with diverse personalities, particularly from his time as an allied commander in the Second World War. From British General Bernard Montgomery to Free French leader Charles de Gaulle, Eisenhower was able to manage people of strong character. Diefenbaker was no exception. The invitation to Diefenbaker to express his views on the subject of Cuba was exactly the gesture that carried great weight with him. This was in direct contrast to Kennedy, who had little time for Diefenbaker or his views on international affairs. Not surprisingly, Eisenhower’s diplomacy often resulted in Diefenbaker’s wholehearted support for US initiatives, while Kennedy’s diplomacy often led Diefenbaker to reject them. Being asked to do something allows for autonomy while told to do something limits it.

This close relationship with Eisenhower led to Diefenbaker being not entirely comfortable about what policy Canada should adopt towards Cuba Following the Revolution. On one hand, he was a staunch Cold Warrior and a firm supporter of the US in the struggle against communism.²¹ Furthermore he did not want to damage his relationship with Eisenhower. On the other hand, he believed that the US approach to Cuba was excessive and he was concerned about Canadian interests on the island, primarily business and banking.²²

The position towards which he gravitated was that communist Cuba did not constitute a threat to Canada, and that to comply fully with the US embargo would harm Canadian trade and commercial interests. His focus was on the effects of Canadian actions/policies on Canada rather than the reception they would receive in the US. This was not a case of anti-Americanism, as has often been maintained by authors such as Newman, Granatstein and Glazov, although Diefenbaker was not above tapping into that strain when he found it in Canadian society.

Anti-American sentiment indeed enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance in Canada during the latter half of the 1950s and Diefenbaker gave expression to negative feelings towards the US during both the 1957 and 1958 elections. He often saw opportunities to score political points by using anti-American rhetoric and took advantage of such situations.²³ However, it is important to differentiate between political rhetoric and Diefenbaker’s actual beliefs. A careful examination of his private correspondence reveals nothing in the way of an anti-American bias and there is little evidence that he let anti-American sentiment dominate his government’s foreign policy.

Another factor in Diefenbaker’s refusal to sever political relations with Cuba or join the US commercial embargo was the opportunity that he believed the Cuban situation created for Canada. Canada could, by virtue of its positive relationship with both Cuba and the US, exert its influence to try and ease the tensions between the two countries. Basil Robinson, Diefenbaker’s liaison to the Department of External Affairs, reported that, as the Cuban-American relations worsened, Diefenbaker indicated that he “wanted to avoid any action that might prejudice Canada’s capacity to ease the strain in US-Cuban relations.”²⁴ He was loath to alienate the Cuban government and lose the leverage that Canada had with it. This was again not a policy

²⁰ Letter from Dwight D. Eisenhower to John G. Diefenbaker,” July 11th, 1960. DCC, Personal and Confidential Correspondence, Box 7, File 232, 004313.

²¹ John M. Kirk and Peter McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations: The Other Good Neighbor Policy* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997), 34.

²² Robinson, 145.

²³ Glazov, 138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

based on an anti-American bias; it was in fact quite the opposite and in keeping with the traditional post-Second World War Canada foreign policy priorities, of Canada serving as a mediator of international tensions. In Diefenbaker's view, Canada was clearly an ally of the US. But it could also play the role of a moderating force between the US and Cuba. Canada could help to move the Cuban government in directions that the United States would like to see it go. In his memoirs Diefenbaker observed that, "by maintaining normal relations with Cuba, Canada might have little opportunity to influence the course of Cuban events; by breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba, Canada would have no opportunity to influence these events at all."²⁵

He did not see his failure to fully support the US embargo as either an anti-American action or as support for the new Castro regime. As he wrote in 1961, "continuation of our trade relations in no way constitutes approval, overt or tacit, of the Government of Cuba nor does that action reveal any alteration in opposition to communism and its works."²⁶ For Diefenbaker, maintaining trade with Cuba was in line with Canada's previous policies and did not constitute a change in Canada's support of the US in the Cold War.

What Diefenbaker did decide to do was place limits on Canada-Cuba trade. He placed an embargo on strategic/military goods, which prevented US goods from being sold to Cuba through Canada and circumventing the embargo.²⁷ The total value of Canadian exports to Cuba actually declined from \$13,000,000 in 1960 to \$10,000,000 in 1962, thus contradicting the numerous letters, editorials and cartoons in the press that argued or implied that Canada was enriching itself through the embargo.²⁸

Diefenbaker was aware of these criticisms and attempted to counter his critics. In a speech he delivered in 1961 he described the attitude of the Canadian government towards Cuba:

The Canadian government is as concerned as any government over the communistic trends of the Cuban government. However, Canada, while deploring the various actions and practices of the Cuban Government, has not considered such disapproval to constitute a reason for departing from the normal relations with which the Canadian Government has endeavoured to maintain with various countries whose philosophies are repugnant to us.²⁹

This was not, however, enough for one State Department official who called Canada's refusal to follow the US lead "disturbing."³⁰ US officials were sufficiently upset with Canada that when Washington severed formal relations with Cuba it refused the British suggestion that Canada represent US interests in Cuba.³¹

Diefenbaker attempted to provide an explanation in the House of Commons during the 1960 winter session. Diefenbaker's comments were succinct; "we respect the views of other nations in their relations with Cuba just as we expect that they respect our views in our

²⁵ Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Vol. 2: The Years of Achievement, 1956-1962*, 174.

²⁶ John G. Diefenbaker, "Letter to Allan Swabey," DCC, Series VI PMO Numbered Correspondence, Vol. 477, File 722/C962, 369872.

²⁷ Jamie Glazov, *Canadian Policy toward Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 113.

²⁸ Glazov, 113.

²⁹ Howard, Green, "Letter to Mr. Robert C. Barker," DCC, Series VI PMO Numbered Correspondence, Vol. 477, File 722/C962, p. 369912.

³⁰ Edelgard Mahant, Graeme S. Mount, *Invisible and Inaudible in Washington: American Policies toward Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 61.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

relations.”³² The statement defined the Canada-US relationship, from Diefenbaker’s perspective. For him it was a relationship based on mutual respect, and the unspoken corollary of respect was equality. Diefenbaker understood fully that Canada and the US were not equal in terms of military and economic power, but he believed that they were both sovereign nations whose decisions deserved equal respect. He believed that there was insufficient justification for Canada to join the US-led boycott, and that joining it would be possible only if Canadian interests would not be harmed.³³ His conclusion was that a boycott would negatively affect Canadian business and banking interests in Cuba. He also believed that, “the diplomatic ostracizing of Cuba by the Western powers could serve only to eliminate her options and drive her into the Soviet orbit.”³⁴

Diefenbaker’s responses to the overtures of the Cuban government are also telling in terms of placing his towards that nation in its proper context. In April, 1959, Castro visited Canada in an attempt to allay fears that Cuba was becoming communist.³⁵ He was invited by a group to visit Montreal and he hoped that this would be followed by an official visit to Ottawa to meet with Diefenbaker.³⁶ Diefenbaker hesitated to extend the invitation and then decided against it. He was uneasy about the nature of Castro’s regime, having received disturbing reports from numerous sources detailing human rights abuses in Cuba, and he did not want to offend Eisenhower.³⁷

On December 9th, 1960, the Cuban government sent an uninvited eleven-man trade delegation, including Cuba’s Minister of Economic Affairs, M. Regino Boti, to Ottawa with the express purpose of increasing Canada-Cuba trade.³⁸ The delegation met with Diefenbaker’s Minister of Trade and Commerce, George Hees, and discussed the subject of selling sugar mill equipment. Afterwards Hees publicly declared “You can’t do business with better businessmen anywhere.”³⁹

Although Hees comments were in keeping with the letter of the government’s policy, which was to expand Canadian trade and maintain a political relationship with Cuba, they were not in keeping with its spirit, which was a reluctant, rather than a wholehearted, acceptance of Cuba’s new regime. Hees was forced to backtrack on his statements a few days later in a television broadcast and apologize for his “insensitive remarks.”⁴⁰ Diefenbaker attempted to make his government’s position clear in a statement he released to the media later that month regarding Canada’s trade with Cuba. He stated:

In answer to those well intentioned people who feel that Canada should follow the course taken by the United States, I would emphasize that no other country, including each and all of the NATO allies of the United States has taken any action to impose a similar trade embargo.

³² House of Commons Debates, December 12th, 1960. p.700.

³³ Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Years of Achievement, 1957-1962, 174.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ James Francis Rochlin, Discovering the Americas: The Evolution of Canadian Foreign Policy towards Latin America (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994), 51.

³⁶ H. Basil Robinson, Diefenbaker’s World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 92.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁸ Gauthier, 55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ Kirk and McKenna, 44.

Embargoes and trade controls are powerful and sometimes double edged weapons. If we use them towards Cuba we may be under pressure to use them elsewhere and unnecessary damage will be done to Canadian trade, present or prospective. As a country which lives by international trade, Canada cannot lightly resort to the weapons of a trade war.

We do not minimize American concern, but it is the Government's view that to maintain mutually beneficial economic relations with Cuba may help to contribute to the restoration of traditional relationships between Cuba and the Western world.

Canada respects the right of every country to determine its own policy towards Cuba; we naturally expect others to respect our right to do likewise.⁴¹

A close examination of the speech reveals no positive references to Cuba. In fact, there is no record of Diefenbaker ever praising Fidel Castro or communist Cuba and he was obviously not won over by Cuban overtures. His decision to continue trade with Cuba was a decision based primarily on the promotion of Canadian interests.

Diefenbaker's sought to promote Canada in dealings with revolutionary Cuba and this involved both cooperation with, and at times a distance from, the US. His red tory beliefs led him to believe that Canada should attempt to have greater autonomy from the US, while being closely allied with it. At the same time, he attempted to find new areas for Canadian economic and commercial expansion in Latin America, which he hoped would mitigate the enormous influence of the US. In Canada's relationship and response to revolutionary Cuba, Diefenbaker stayed remarkably true to his red tory ideals.

Diefenbaker and the Cuban Missile Crisis

On October 25th, 1962, US President John F. Kennedy appeared before the world via a live televised broadcast and announced that the Soviet Union had placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. The US Navy, he said, would enforce a complete blockade of Cuba until the missiles were removed. The Soviet Union sent its own ships towards the island and a nuclear confrontation loomed. Though the US government hoped for support from its European allies, it expected the Canada government to follow its lead during the Crisis. Specifically, when US leaders proposed that the Canadian forces of NORAD be placed on heightened alert, they expected that the Canadian government would respond at once. In the event, Diefenbaker waited two days before authorizing such an alert.

Diefenbaker's decision to wait two days before agreeing to the heightened alert has been a source of great controversy. The decision was influenced, in large part, by his determination that Canada should respond to the crisis on its own terms, that is, on the basis of the Canadian government's own assessment of the threat and how it might best be handled and a catastrophe averted. It was, in many ways, a red tory response.

Throughout their deliberations on how to handle the emerging threat in Cuba, the US government did not, at any time, inform the Canadian government about the growing nuclear threat that the island represented. It was not until mere hours before he publicly addressed the US public that Kennedy sent an emissary to Diefenbaker to inform him of US plans. Subsequently a request came from Washington that Canadian forces in NORAD be placed on a

⁴¹ "Trade with Cuba," Statement issued to the Press by the Prime Minister, December 23rd, 1960. DCC, Prime Minister's Office Numbered Correspondence, Vol. 476, File 722/C962, 369076-7.

heightened state of alert. The expectation was that the Canadian government would comply at once, but Diefenbaker refused to do so. Two days went by while Cabinet engaged in a very divisive deliberation over what position the Canadian government should take.

Diefenbaker's delay raised two important questions: was it justified? and why the delay in the first place? For Diefenbaker's detractors, the answers were easy. The delay constituted, in effect, a refusal to support one's ally, which could not be justified at a time of nuclear confrontation on any grounds. Why the delay? It was the regrettable and unacceptable result of Diefenbaker's anti-Americanism and his indecisiveness.⁴²

Neither accusation is accurate. The claim that Diefenbaker was indecisive does not stand up to scrutiny. Regardless of whether or not his actions were justified, they were clearly decisive. He decided that it would be unwise to rush into offering support to the US.⁴³ There was not, at any time, any wavering on this position.⁴⁴ The charge that Diefenbaker's decision was the product of his anti-Americanism is not supported by the historical record, as will be shown below. A variety of influences that determined Diefenbaker's approach and actions, notably his desire to act in what he perceived to be Canada's interest.

One of these influences was Diefenbaker's perception of the origins of the crisis. With his abiding interest in international affairs, Diefenbaker watched as the tensions between Cuba and the US slowly became part of the escalating Cold War conflict. He laid a substantial portion of the blame for this turn of events at the feet of the Kennedy Administration. He believed that the roots of the Cuban Missile Crisis were to be found in the Bay of Pigs invasion. He had viewed this earlier adventure as risky and it led him to question the judgment of Kennedy and his advisors.⁴⁵ These people had been all too willing to take risks but obviously had not thought through the potential consequences of their plans. It was this combination of risk-taking and lack of foresight that Diefenbaker feared would lead the world to nuclear war. The Bay of Pigs invasion also told Diefenbaker that he had been correct to maintain Canada's trading relationship with Cuba. Castro, he believed, was not going anywhere and US actions against the Cuban government continued to produce unfortunate outcomes — notably pushing Cuba into the arms of the Soviet Bloc, and then turning Castro into a hero for standing up to the US.

Diefenbaker believed that the US defeat at the Bay of Pigs also hurt US pride and public standing. He worried that the event had sent Kennedy and other government officials looking for a confrontation to regain both.⁴⁶ The sting of the failure had been that much more painful for the US coming as it did mere days after the Soviet Union had successfully put the first man, Yuri Gagarin, in space. It appeared that the Soviet Union had gained the upper hand in space at the same time as a small island had repulsed US efforts to interfere in its internal politics.

When US government officials learned of the emplacement of nuclear weapons in Cuba, Diefenbaker believed, they had decided that the only response was to confront Khrushchev. Diefenbaker was very doubtful about the wisdom of this strategy. He had told Kennedy in a

⁴² See, for example, Glazov, 153.

⁴³ Diefenbaker, *One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967*, 86.

⁴⁴ See Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Studies, 1993), 201.

⁴⁵ Denis Smith, *Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 119.

⁴⁶ John G. Diefenbaker, *One Canada: Vol. 2, The Years of Achievement, 1956 to 1962* (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1976), 174.

previous conversation: “I do not think the USSR will go to war over Cuba.”⁴⁷ In his memoirs, he would maintain that the approach taken by Khrushchev was to create a “moderate and reasonable image.”⁴⁸ It was US leaders, still smarting from the Bay of Pigs invasion, that had brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Diefenbaker’s hesitation in agreeing to a move Canada to a heightened alert status was clearly prompted by his desire to avoid encouraging the Kennedy leadership in its confrontation with the Soviet Union. He believed that the correct action for Canada was to calm a situation that was being aggravated by US actions. For Diefenbaker, it was US insecurities that were driving the confrontation, not Soviet ambitions.

From his perspective, the confrontation could and should have been dealt with by negotiations. He had initially hoped that the UN could play a role in resolving the conflict and proposed that it be dealt with by an international inspection team.⁴⁹ He was emphatic that the Canadian government must not “do or say anything that could add to the seriousness of the Crisis.”⁵⁰ Since it was the US government which had aggravated the situation, it made no sense for Canada to come to its support. His hope was to defuse the crisis. Thus, he delayed agreeing to a heightened alert. Only when it became obvious that the crisis had moved beyond the UN, and that the Soviet Union was not going to back down did he decide that Canada should stand with the US in the crisis. At this point he came to believe that there was a genuine threat to the security of Canada and its people.

Diefenbaker’s experience dealing with Kennedy also told him that the root of the confrontation over Cuba lay with the US. Much has been written on the strains of the Diefenbaker-Kennedy relationship caused by their incompatible personalities.⁵¹ This certainly played a role in the crisis, as the two leaders undeniably had a loathing for each other.⁵² A deeper source of the tension between them, however, was political, rather than personal. It had to do with their respective perceptions of the relationship that existed between the two countries. A comment by Diefenbaker near the end of the first meeting in Washington between the two leaders provides clarity on his view of the relationship: “We must”, he said, “live together in friendship and cooperation. Neither of us can survive without the other.”⁵³ In short, Diefenbaker believed that Canada and the United States were independent partners who needed each other. The problem with the Kennedy White House was that it did not view Canada as a partner, nor the US as a country needing Canada’s support.⁵⁴

Kennedy and Diefenbaker were basing their policy assumptions on very different conceptions of the Canada-US relationship. The reality was that Canada’s position in the world had changed since the end of the Second World War, when its military and economic capabilities had been substantial compared to the devastated countries in Europe and Asia. By 1960, the recovery of these countries, particularly those in Europe, had greatly diminished Canada’s

⁴⁷ John G. Diefenbaker, One Canada: Vol. 3, The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967 (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1977), 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁹ Denis Smith, Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker (Toronto: MacFarlane, Walter and Ross, 1995), 457.

⁵⁰ Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967, 86.

⁵¹ See Knowlton Nash’s Fear and Loathing Across the undefended Border; Peter C. Newman’s Renegade in Power.

⁵² Smith, 388.

⁵³ Memorandum of Conversation, Visit of Canadian Prime Minister Diefenbaker, Washington, February 20th, 1961. Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963 Vol. XIII (Washington, Department of State, 1994), 1145.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-76.

influence in the world.⁵⁵ Diefenbaker understood this but he continued to view Canada as an integral part of the western alliance and an important defence partner of the US. The NORAD Agreement was a concrete expression of that partnership — with its requirement that there be advance consultation and agreement by the partners before any military action could be taken against a perceived threat. Kennedy, however, took a different view, considering Canada a less than equal partner, required to follow and support the US lead, a view which was not incompatible with Diefenbaker's red tory nationalism.

The success of the Canada-US relationship had always been based on good will. Where Eisenhower had viewed it as important to cultivate the Canadian Prime Minister through small gestures such as consultation and personal diplomacy, Kennedy saw little value in this. From the moment of his delay in responding to Diefenbaker's congratulatory message on his presidential victory, Kennedy acted in a manner that was hardly designed, or likely, to win over Diefenbaker. Indeed the record shows that Kennedy did not make strong efforts to win anyone over to his foreign policy positions.⁵⁶

Furthermore, Kennedy failed to follow through on a pledge to keep the Canadian government informed on the progress of US-Cuban relations. At an April 1961 meeting between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, at which they discussed the Bay of Pigs, Diefenbaker was assured by the President that he would be consulted before the US took any further steps to intervene militarily in Cuba.⁵⁷ Perhaps Kennedy forgot his promise while he considered ordering a military blockade of Cuba. It is quite certain that Diefenbaker did not forget,⁵⁸ providing a further reason why he was so angry at not being consulted over the new Cuban crisis.

Diefenbaker's anger towards Kennedy was compounded by his distrust for him. In his memoirs, he would say that he believed Kennedy "was perfectly capable of taking the world to the brink of thermal-nuclear destruction to prove himself a man for our times, a courageous champion of Western democracy."⁵⁹ To Diefenbaker, it was not fear of the US that influenced Canada's approach during the Cuban Missile Crisis; it was fear of Kennedy.

While it is arguable that Diefenbaker was too sensitive to personal slights and let his feelings about Kennedy get in the way of the possibility of an effective response to a serious international crisis, Kennedy must shoulder at least some of the blame for the stand-off between the Canadian and US governments. What Kennedy was seeking in fact was political support. But his judgment was poor if he was assuming that he could get such support from a man with whom he had never bothered to develop a positive relationship.

Yet Diefenbaker's approach to the crisis was determined ultimately not by personalities but rather by considerations relating to Canada's national interests. The priorities that drove Diefenbaker were the same ones that underlay his foreign policies in general — the desire to achieve greater autonomy for Canada in foreign affairs. Nor was Diefenbaker's approach to this crisis that much different from the approach that had been taken by previous Liberal governments, which favoured having international conflicts referred to, and if possible settled

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Kevin J. Gloin, "Canada-US Relations in the Diefenbaker Era: Another Look" in The Diefenbaker Legacy: Canadian Politics, Law and Society Since 1957 edited by Donald C. Story and R. Bruce Shepard (Regina: Canadian Great Plains Research Center, 1988), 11.

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker – Cuba and Latin America, Ottawa, May 17th, 1961. Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963 Vol. XIII, 1153.

⁵⁸ Diefenbaker, One Canada. Memoirs of the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker: The Years of Achievement, 1957 to 1962, 171.

⁵⁹ Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967, 80.

by, multilateral organizations. Diefenbaker's attempt to have the crisis dealt with by the UN was very much in keeping with the Canadian tradition of middle power internationalism,⁶⁰ as was his effort to lower the temperature of the international system caused by the escalating conflict by the US and the Soviets over Cuba. In the event, the US was not prepared under any circumstances to allow the UN to deal with the crisis and expressed considerable displeasure with the Canadian idea of a UN inspection team.

The same disrespect that was shown by Kennedy for Diefenbaker was also demonstrated by the messenger who was sent to brief Ottawa on the crisis, former US Ambassador to Canada, Livingston Merchant. In a conversation with Basil Robinson a few months after the crisis, Merchant made clear his own views regarding the necessity of consultation with America's NORAD partner. In response to Robinson's comments that he felt sorry for Diefenbaker because of the position in which he had been placed by the lack of consultation, Merchant replied,

I personally didn't feel a tenth as sorry for the PM as I had for Harold Macmillan who had comparably short advance notice. I didn't think Canada had earned, by its actions and by certain non-actions, the right to extreme intimacy of relations which had existed in years past.⁶¹

The problem with Merchant's viewpoint is that Canada did not have to earn the right to consultation; NORAD required it.

In addition to Diefenbaker's perception of the origins of the crisis and his relationship with Kennedy, he was also influenced by his personal assessment of the threat posed by the Soviet Union. The placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba was not seen as a Cuban action but rather a Soviet one and he therefore placed it in the context of the Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the US. Furthermore, he believed that "Khrushchev had been caught fishing in American waters" but that he had "no interest in a major confrontation with the United States except where the vital security interests of the USSR are at stake."⁶² In the end, Diefenbaker assessed the Soviet threat in the context of Canada's national interest which led him to state in his memoirs, "Certainly we wanted the Soviet missiles removed from Cuba: but not if there was an alternative, at the price of global destruction."⁶³

Diefenbaker's assessment of the Cuban Missile Crisis was that it was not really a military confrontation but rather a dangerous international situation made worse by the actions of a US President who was determined to confront the communist enemy militarily. Diefenbaker determined that Kennedy's concern, from the beginning, was to appear strong to Khrushchev and the Soviet Union. He had decided that once Soviet nuclear weapons were present in the western hemisphere it would be impossible to dislodge them. Diefenbaker by contrast believed that removing the missiles was possible through negotiation.⁶⁴

Once it became apparent that the crisis could not be settled by negotiations and that a nuclear confrontation was inevitable, Diefenbaker took the position that the time had come to prepare Canada for an attack by those who posed a direct threat to Canada's territory and the lives of its citizens. Rising in the House of Commons, he stated:

⁶⁰ Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967, 88.

⁶¹ Memorandum from Livingston T. Merchant to Secretary of State Rusk and Under Secretary of State (Ball). Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963 Vol. XIII, 1190.

⁶² Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967, 82.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁴ For Kennedy's view see Schlesinger, 803 for Diefenbaker's see Diefenbaker, One Canada: The Tumultuous Years, 1962 to 1967, 86.

I think Canadians are in general agreement that these offensive weapons, located so contiguously to our continent are a direct and immediate menace to Canada. Furthermore they are a serious menace to the deterrent strength of the whole western alliance on which our security is founded.⁶⁵

Canadian forces would be placed on high alert.

What is clear is that Diefenbaker's decisions during the Cuban Missile Crisis reflected his personal conviction that Canada's foreign policy should serve the country's national interests. His refusal to offer immediate and unconditional support for the Kennedy Administration in confronting Khrushchev was a product of his belief that such action would make the crisis worse, heightening instability in a way that could only threaten trade and other interests of Canada in and beyond the region. Canadians simply saw Cuba through a different lens than the Americans. For Canada, Cuba represented trade and new opportunities to build commercial and other ties. For the US, it represented a potential security threat off the coast of the state of Florida. It became a security issue for Canada only when the Kennedy Administration made it one. In the event, Canada went further than any other allied country in its support for the US, and Diefenbaker's action in the crisis were entirely consistent with his red tory beliefs.

Conclusion

Diefenbaker's foreign policies were deeply influenced by his red tory views of Canadian nationalism which was reflected in his desire to create a greater autonomy for Canada in foreign affairs. He did not reject membership in the OAS, refuse to join the US embargo of Cuba or hesitate to offer full support to the US at the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis out of a sense of anti-Americanism or because of his indecisiveness but rather because he believed these actions to be in the best interest of Canada. This focus on Canadian interest was a remarkably consistent feature of Diefenbaker's foreign policies and offers testimony against claims that he was nothing but a "flip flopper" or strictly a populist, rather the case can be made that he was in fact a red tory in foreign affairs.

⁶⁵ House of Commons Debates, October 25th, 1962, 911.