

Brief Summary of Interviewee Opinions on the End of the Cold War

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The essays in this publication relied extensively on the political interviews that were conducted by Dr. Alexander von Plato and the University of Winnipeg students. The interviews were based on a series of questions that considered Canada's role in the unification of the German states and the subsequent end to the Cold War. All the interviewees played a role in Canada's involvement at the end of the Cold War, whether that was in the government, parliamentary opposition, foreign affairs, or the defense department. Thus, the researchers were exposed to differing opinions and explanations for why the Cold War ended and what Canada's role was in the unification of Germany. This paper will briefly summarize the personal opinions of each of the interviewees involved in this project. It hopes to provide a broader understanding of the role Canada played at the end of the twentieth century.¹

In 1989, Paul Heinbecker worked in Ottawa as Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's chief foreign policy advisor and speechwriter and assistant secretary to cabinet for foreign and defense policy. In his interview, he suggested that the "writing on the wall" for the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union could be traced back to the mid-1980s. He made mention of former Canadian ambassador, Klaus Goldschlag who was already convinced during his post in Germany from 1980 to 1983 that the Soviet Union would collapse and the German states would unify. Heinbecker noted that few foresaw the end of the Cold War that early, however he believed that throughout the Cold War conflict the Canadian people never believed the Soviet Union was as powerful as the Americans made them out to be.

¹ The interviews were made available by Alexander von Plato and the Oral History Institute at the University of Winnipeg. All interview transcripts are in the possession of Alexander von Plato. These include: John Noble, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato, Chris Clements, and Hayley Caldwell, Ottawa, January 25, 2013; Robert Fowler, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato and University of Winnipeg students, Winnipeg and Ottawa via Skype, March 18, 2013; Paul Heinbecker, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato, Chris Clements, and Karen Brglez, Ottawa, January 21, 2013; Jeremy Kinsman, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato. Winnipeg and Victoria via Skype. April 29, 2013; Bill Blaikie, Interviewed by Alexander von Plato and University of Winnipeg students, Winnipeg, March 25, 2013; and Lloyd Axworthy. Interviewed by Alexander von Plato and Karen Brglez, Winnipeg, November 2, 2012.

By the late 1980s as the Cold War slowed, Heinbecker noted that Mulroney had an impressive record in foreign policy. He highlighted Mulroney's support for sanctions against South Africa, his willingness to work cooperatively with the Americans and other European countries, and he mentioned that Mulroney was an active mediator for the major powers. As revolution gripped Eastern Europe in 1989, Mulroney was in conversation monthly with Kohl, Bush, Mitterrand, and Thatcher. Heinbecker made it clear that the Conservatives were supporters of Kohl and his western oriented plans for unification. In addition, the Canadian people thought the German division was "unfinished business from the war" that needed to be dealt with. He confirmed that Mulroney always supported a united Germany in NATO. When questioned whether there could have been new security architecture in the new post-Cold War Europe he explained that only NATO has the capacity to act, and that any other security structure would not have the capacity to respond to Russian aggression. The idea of installing new security architecture was merely an unrealistic "pipe dream" advocated by the Canadian leftist New Democratic Party (NDP). Heinbecker reiterated that the Russians had been a serious threat since the end of the Second World War and are still a residual threat; therefore "NATO remains a kind of insurance policy for this kind of irredentist Russian behavior." He believed that the Cold War is over, but there is now a "cool war" between Russia and the West. Regarding the Two-Plus-Four talks that were created to resolve the external aspects of German unification, he suggested that Canada would have liked to play a larger role in the negotiations, but the Conservatives were aware that the Canadians were not one of the principal players, so they never pressed to be involved.

In his interview, former Canadian diplomat, John Noble explained that the Canadians were the ones to first propose the Open Skies Initiative in spring 1989. Mulroney pushed for the agreement with Bush in May, and tried to persuade him by saying, "If you don't do it, Gorbachev may." Three days after that meeting, Bush proposed the Open Skies Agreement in a speech at the Texas A & M University. The Open Skies Agreement was founded in February 1990 where the Four Powers (United States, The Soviet Union, Britain, and France) announced that they would use the Two-Plus-Four formula to deal with the German division. According to Noble, the smaller European powers were upset with being excluded from the talks, and some officials in Canada were also frustrated with being left out. Noble suggested that although Joe Clark, the Minister for External Affairs, may have felt left out, his "main purpose was to keep NATO united and the only way to keep NATO united on this was to endorse this proposal." He agreed with Heinbecker that NATO had always been Canada's sole security alignment and Mulroney never pushed for other options. Noble suggested that the Conservatives were not bold in their European foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. He remarked that "I don't think we tried very hard, Clark was not that interested in

Europe” and that Clark often avoided NATO ministerial meetings due to the feeling that the Canadian presence was irrelevant. For Noble, in the end Canada played a minor role in ending the Cold War. Its involvement was conditional to its role in the CSCE and its small role in reshaping NATO. The Canadians used the CSCE to “hammer the Russians on human rights” and there was an economic aspect to helping end the Cold War, but there was no initiative from the Conservative government to push for new security architecture in Europe.

Former diplomat and Director General of Foreign Intelligence, Gaetan Lavertu believed that German reunification became a realistic possibility in November 1989. In his interview, he placed an emphasis on the “people power” throughout the revolutionary year with the mass exodus from East Germany through the Hungarian border, the demonstrations in Leipzig, and then the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Lavertu stated that the factors “in my view meant that things would be different.” He mentioned that the Canadians supported Kohl in his plans for German unification and that they did not believe the division of Germany to be a good thing. In his recollection, he believed that the majority of Canadians had a good disposition for German reunification as long as it was achieved within acceptable conditions.

Lavertu was very diplomatic in his response for how Canada helped end the Cold War. He said that Canada did not play a direct role, but it made encouraging moves to help create a greater common market in Europe, it reinforced the CSCE, and it helped redefine NATO in 1990. He mentioned Mulroney and Clark’s support for the Two-Plus-Four and in response whether there was disappointment that the Canadians had been excluded from the talks he stated, “We had to be realistic. It’s always nice to be in, but at the same time, we did not have the mandate over Berlin that the French or the British or the Americans or the Russians had.” He explained that Mulroney was always favourable to German unification and his primary concern was to preserve NATO. It was Canada’s primary security policy and it had to be protected in the context of rebuilding Europe. In the end, Lavertu believed that the West did not end the Cold War. Rather, it was the failure of the Soviet Union that brought a stop to the Cold War. It was the disintegration of the economic system, but also Gorbachev’s willingness to enact reform and to allow the Soviet bloc countries to go their own way by the late 1980s.

In the interview with former Canadian diplomat, Jeremy Kinsman emphasized the role of former Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau in helping bring forward the international conditions that helped enable the end of the Cold War. He acknowledged that Trudeau was less doctrinaire in respect to the Soviet Union than the Americans. He stated, “Canada at that time had a somewhat different notion of the relationship strategically in the Cold War to the Soviet Union.” Kinsman explained that Trudeau distrusted NATO and believed it be a distinctly

American led organization. Trudeau was a promoter for détente and he believed NATO was not interested in easing East-West tensions in the 1970s. Kinsman also emphasized the role of the CSCE in helping prepare the conditions for the end of the Cold War. He did not believe the conference itself was that important, but he alleged the Helsinki accords, particularly “basket 3” which agreed to respect human rights, allowed for the flourishing of free speech throughout Eastern Europe. This agreement helped set the stage for revolution.

Kinsman also recalled that by the end of the Cold War, the single greatest achievement to come out was the unification of the German states. Like his colleagues, he reiterated that by the end of the 1980s the Canadians were not opposed to Germany reuniting. He believed that Canada had no place in deciding the terms of German reunifying. There were no reasons for him as to why Canada could have been included in the Two-Plus-Four talks. When questioned whether Canada could have had a special role like Poland, he remarked, “Poland had a border with Germany, Canada did not,” and when asked whether Canada could have been involved because of their troops in West Germany he stated, “Everybody had troops in Germany, the United States still has troops in Germany.” Also, since Canada was in the process of withdrawing its troops which had been initiated under Trudeau, Kinsman believed this gave Canada little credentials to be involved at the Two-Plus-Four talks.

By the end of the Cold War, Kinsman also believed that the East-West tensions have not vanished. He did not think that this was merely due to NATO’s continued existence, but instead due to the Eastern European countries induction of NATO in the mid-1990s. It was difficult for Russia to watch the Baltic countries join NATO, but Kinsman suggested that even harder were the countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia. He suggested that “the Russians began to feel psychologically as if they were being treated like losers. It was the perpetual march eastwards that was psychologically damaging to the Russians.”

This idea was also discussed in the interview with former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy. He suggested that NATO’s efforts to expand eastward have sent the Soviet Union the wrong set of signals that have allowed for a “cool war” to continue. He explained that forging new security architecture was never a realistic option for Canada and that NATO policy was a “fixed anchor in Canadian foreign policy.” According to Axworthy, this was also reinforced in Canada by the large Eastern European lobby groups that were suspicious of the Soviet Union. By the time the Cold War ended, these groups were anxious to expand democracy into Eastern Europe and NATO was seen as the organization which could make it happen. Axworthy also discussed the frustration that the Canadians felt for being left out of the Two-Plus-Four negotiations. He said that the feeling of being excluded is still felt to this day, particularly among those outside of the United Nations Security Council.

In the interview with former Canadian diplomat and Deputy Minister of National Defense, Robert Fowler also contended that Canada has a history of being excluded from the decision making in international diplomacy. He argued that the major powers never wanted a smaller country like Canada determining the trajectory of policy. He commented how the major powers had been upset with Trudeau's 1983 peace initiative, which had attempted to change the pace of East-West relations. As well, they were frustrated with Canada when it discussed withdrawing its troops from Germany. He stated that "Kohl didn't want a minor North American player forcing his hand." However, Fowler suggested that although Canada feels that it deserves a larger role on the international stage it does little to change its circumstances. According to Fowler, it was embarrassing for the Canadians to host the Open Skies meeting where the Two-Plus-Four talks were being discussed, but to then be excluded from the forum. He was the one political interviewee that felt this was "belittling" for Canada and that the Canadians merely became the "hotel keepers." He argued that Canada's troops in Germany gave Canada enough clout to be involved in the talks. He argued, "I would like to have seen Canada more insistent that we be at such tables...we had earned our membership, we had paid the cost of admission to be determining the future shape of Europe." When questioned whether there could have been new security architecture that would have included the Soviet Union and the NATO countries, Fowler thought that was an "idiotic" concept. He believed that Gorbachev finally acquiesced to a united Germany in NATO because he wanted West Germany to economically "hold up" the GDR, and this would only happen if the Americans and the West Germans got their way, a united Germany aligned with NATO.

Concerning the end of the Cold War, Fowler believed that it started with the American-Soviet summit in Reykjavik. He mentioned that he did not know at that time what would emerge in the future, but from that point on he thought things would be different between the East and West. He also made mention that the lessening of Reagan's anti-communist rhetoric in Reykjavik was extremely similar to what Trudeau had been advocating for in his international peace initiative. He stated, "The more Conservative members of the Alliance, very much dominated by Reagan and Thatcher, found Trudeau's presumption to set a new tone for East-West relations annoying and they dismissed it out of hand. Although, just eighteen months to two years later, Reagan was saying things very similar to what Trudeau had been saying." Fowler was a clear supporter of Trudeau's efforts to further détente politics.

The final interviewee, Bill Blaikie had been the official opposition critic for foreign affairs in the Canadian parliament at the end of the 1980s as the Cold War was coming to a close. He had been involved in a parliamentary "Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade" established by the

Conservative government to help determine the Canadian approach to the events in the Soviet Union and the German states. In his interview he highlighted some of the objectives that the committee recommended in 1990. One of them was, “The uniting of Europe with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe occupying one end of the European home and Canada and the United States together. We see a special opportunity for Canada to participate in the design and building of new Pan-European institutions.” Blaikie explained that the committee believed there was a need to draw closer the Soviet Union into the European and North American community. According to him, this could have been achieved by abandoning NATO and the Warsaw Pact and creating a new all-inclusive security alliance. This was the “pipe dream” according to other interviewers, although Blaikie believed it never came into fruition because the policy makers wanted to “make it (the Cold War) into a victory for the good guys instead of an opportunity to create whole new security architecture.” He explained that the committee’s recommendations were largely ignored and the Conservative government chose to endorse NATO as their security vehicle for the post-Cold War order.

Blaikie also believed that the recommendations were ignored because Canada was not in a position to dictate the tide of NATO or force their way into the Two-Plus-Four talks. Like the other interviewees he explained that Canada was consistently being excluded in the international arena. He stated, “Canada’s a kind of a spectator even though they might be at the table. I’ve been to a lot of NATO parliamentary meetings over the years and it’s like Canada isn’t even in the room...the debate in NATO was always cast as the European position and the American position and sometimes it was as though Canada wasn’t there.” For Blaikie, the opportunity to eliminate the entirety of tension between East and West was lost when the western alliance, including the Canadian conservatives supported the continued existence of NATO and its eventual expansion into Eastern Europe.

Each of the interviewees in this project offered their personal understanding of Canada’s involvement in helping end the Cold War and also its participation (or lack of) in the uniting of the two German states. A common theme to run through the majority of the interviews was that Canada was often underestimated on the international stage. Several of the interviewees expressed frustration that Canada’s influence was restricted to a middle power standing within world diplomacy. However, Fowler was the only interviewee that was seriously agitated for being excluded from the German talks. He believed that Mulroney’s Conservatives should have demanded to be at the Two-Plus-Four negotiations. While the other interviewees noted the exclusion, they emphasized Canada’s role in helping end the Cold War through its involvement in the CSCE, the rebuilding of NATO, and its economic offerings to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As the Cold War ended and NATO expanded eastward in the mid-

1990s, some of the interviewees expressed concern over the continued hostility between the East and West and questioned how the current international climate would like look if they would have pressed for a different security paradigm. The concerns with Russia today may be the consequences of the politics from this time. All of the interviews in this research project offer a glimpse into how the Canadian politicians work to understand their personal involvement, including their country's efforts to help cease the longstanding Cold War confrontation.