Research article

‘Keen to Foul Their Own Nests’: Contemporary and Historical Criticism of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence of 1940

Galen Roger Perras¹,*


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*Correspondence: g.perras@uottawa.ca
¹University of Ottawa, Canada
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Galen Roger Perras

Abstract

On 17 August 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt met with Canada’s Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in the town of Ogdensburg, which lies just across the Canadian border in upstate New York. There the two leaders agreed on the formation of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) to advise on policies for the defence and security of the North American continent. The PJBD was commended on all sides, in public at least, not only in the United States and Canada but also in Britain, where the new prime minister, Winston Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons on 20 August, compared the trend towards growing cooperation between the British Empire and the United States to the relentless flow of the Mississippi river. He also referred approvingly to the Permanent Joint Board in his post-war Fulton speech, delivered on 5 March 1946, as an important element in the ‘special relationship’ between the British Empire and the United States. Later commentators, including John Bartlet Brebner, have also seen the Joint Board as a significant part of the ‘North Atlantic Triangle’. However, as this article shows, the PJBD has also attracted plenty of criticism – both contemporary and historical.

Keywords Permanent Joint Board on Defence; PJBD; Franklin Roosevelt; William Lyon Mackenzie King; Winston Churchill; North Atlantic Triangle.
On 17 August 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) and Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, in Ogdensburg, New York, formed the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD) to create continental defence plans. Secretary of War Henry Stimson, witnessing ‘very possibly the turning point in the tide of the war’, wrote that a ‘perfectly delighted’ King had agreed to FDR’s notion ‘almost with tears in his eyes’. O. D. Skelton, Canada’s Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs since 1925 – King did not take Skelton to Ogdensburg – praised the PJBD as ‘the best day’s work for many a year’ and the ‘inevitable sequence of public policies and personal relationships, based upon the realization of the imperative necessity of close understanding between the English-speaking peoples’.¹ The New York Times lauded the signatories for bypassing ‘the usual formalities of diplomatic intercourse’ and making North America ‘an entity in repelling threats from abroad’. Almost 84 per cent of Canadians backed the PJBD, and 87 per cent of Americans saw it as ‘opening the way for an eventual defensive alliance’ with Canada.²

In his seminal 1945 monograph North Atlantic Triangle, John Bartlet Brebner’s intent ‘was to get at, and to set forth, the interplay between the United States and Canada – the Siamese Twins of North America who cannot separate and live’. Still, Canada and America ‘could not eliminate Great Britain from their courses of action, whether in the realm of ideas, like democracy, or of institutions, or of economic and political processes’.³ And while the book’s chapter about strategic interplay prior to 1942 is its weakest, Brebner praised the PJBD for ‘solidly’ filling a ‘conspicuous gap’ in the ‘inter-American system’. He also cited British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s 20 August 1940 public assertion that:

> These two great organizations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States, will have to be somewhat mixed up together in some of their affairs for mutual and general advantage. For my own part, looking out upon the future, I do not view the process with any misgivings. I could not stop it if I wished; no one can stop it. Like the Mississippi, it just keeps rolling along. Let it roll. Let it roll on full flood, inexorable, irresistible, benignant, to broader lands and better days.⁴

Yet the PJBD incited much criticism. While Britain’s Cabinet, on 19 August 1940, ‘took note with satisfaction’ of King’s telegram explaining the Ogdensburg meeting, the mood had soured two days later. As ‘Mr. Mackenzie King was putting himself into a difficult position from the view of Canadian politics’ and might encounter problems to ‘obtain
approval’ to permit US military manoeuvres in Canada, Churchill would ‘introduce one or two cautionary phrases’ in his reply to King. Cabling King on 22 August, Churchill threatened that if Britain prevailed against Germany, ‘all these transactions will be judged in a mood different to that while the issue still stands in the balance’.5 Canada’s former Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen – despite telling a British friend in June 1940 that ‘most certainly the United States will have to come in [to the war]’ – nearly ‘lost his breakfast’ as the deal’s ‘disgusting publicity’ would buttress ‘the idea that we do not have to exert ourselves’ militarily. Galled that King and Skelton steadfastly had refused to jointly plan with Britain before 1939 ‘for fear it might entangle us in war’, Meighen acidly remarked there was no danger of the PJBD ‘entangling us in the war because there is no Spain left that the United States could lick’.6

Many American anti-interventionists feared that security ties with a belligerent Canada would drag America into another European war. Britain’s Dominions Office worried that an avaricious FDR hoped to detach Canada from the Empire, while Australians puzzled over why FDR would not give them a similar defensive deal. Canadian generals, pleased that the PJBD permitted them to ship more forces to Britain, sought to limit continental defence burdens that might injure the overseas war effort. British and Australian historians either ignored the PJBD or castigated it as a selfish scheme designed to isolate North America. For American scholars, the PJBD lacked true strategic import, nor did it demonstrate Canada’s natural entry into America’s security orbit. In Canada, while some averred that catastrophic defeats in Europe had left King no choice but to embrace FDR’s plan, most concur that the PJBD irrevocably tied Canada’s security, for good or bad, to America.

FDR’s interest in Canadian security predated 1940’s dark summer. He had told King in 1936 that a highway built across western Canada could speed US troops to Alaska to combat Japanese threats. The President had also covertly convened US and Canadian service heads in January 1938 to discuss west coast security, then had pronounced in August 1938 that he would defend Canada against foreign empires. Often wrongly castigated as obsequious in his dealings with FDR, King had to be convinced by America’s Minister to Canada to send officers to Washington in 1938 as King feared that American security guarantees would threaten Canada’s independence.7 But as Germany ran riot through France in spring 1940, King, noting FDR’s public declaration on 18 April 1940 that his Cabinet would protect Canada from foreign powers,8 sent Department of External Affairs (DEA) staffer H. L. Keenleyside to meet FDR on 19 May. Desirous that the Royal Navy decamp to North America if Britain fell, FDR wanted
King to push that scenario. Although appalled the Americans were using Canada to ‘protect themselves’, King fretfully contacted Churchill on 30 May. Britain’s new leader offered two responses. He stirringly pledged on 4 June to ‘fight on beaches, landing grounds, in fields, on streets and on the hills. We shall never surrender.’ If Britain fell, he would fight on with ‘our empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet’. Churchill’s private message to King put matters more ominously. If Britain was ‘conquered locally’, the fleet might go to Canada if America was fighting. If America was neutral and Britain was ‘overpowered’, Churchill could not say ‘what policy might be adopted by a pro-German administration such as would undoubtedly be set up’. A furious FDR wanted King to tell Churchill that a naval transfer was designed ‘to save the empire’. When King wired London on 17 June about the transfer plus permitting American access to British bases in the western hemisphere, Churchill saw ‘no reason to make preparation or give countenance’ to such initiatives.

King summoned the new US Minister to Canada, J. P. Moffat, on 14 June. Moffat had been sent to Ottawa in late May with firm presidential orders to emphasise two things to Canadians: (1) Canada, ‘for its own sake’, should seek assurances Britain’s navy would not surrender; and (2) a neutral America could aid the Allies almost as much as a belligerent America. As Canada ‘would immediately be faced by many problems of a practical nature which could not be solved without American aid’ if Britain foundered, King pressed Moffat ‘to feel out the situation and let him know’ if FDR would permit staff talks. As a noted anti-interventionist Anglophobe – Moffat had rejected Stimson’s 3 May assertion that this was ‘our war’ too – King’s comments indicated that Canadians wanting closer ties with America had bested those clinging ‘to the old colonial mentality’. Moffat happily relayed King’s proposal to Secretary of State Cordell Hull on 16 June.

An uninterested Hull, having rejected Ambassador Lord Lothian’s plea for UK–US staff talks, deflected Canada’s request to the Navy and War departments. Hull’s tactic was an error as the War Plans Division (WPD) already had recommended talks to determine if Canada could defend itself. Vitally, Hull had misjudged his boss. After FDR met Lothian’s request and then appointed Stimson and fellow interventionist Frank Knox to head the War and Navy departments on 19 June, a backpedalling Hull brought Moffat briefly back to Washington to discuss Canada. United States Navy commander Admiral Harold Stark and Brigadier General George Strong wanted to speak to Canada. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall did not, as talks were pointless until FDR had decided what to do if Britain fell. Although ‘an entirely frank’ disclosure
of America’s military situation might prove discouraging, Marshall would ‘be delighted’ to meet Canadian officials although ‘he feared under the present conditions he would be more the talker than the listener’. Marshall’s delight dissipated when he met FDR and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau on 3 July. Opposed to aiding the Allies as vital arms would be lost if Germany prevailed, Marshall said that US forces should enter Canada only during a crisis. Morgenthau dressed down Marshall as such talks might reveal Canada’s military capabilities and prompt bilateral cooperation. Agreeing with Morgenthau, FDR thus enjoined Moffat to invite ‘high-ranking’ Canadians to Washington to discuss ‘matters of our respective interests in the field of defense’.15

Three Canadian officers came to Washington on 11 July to discuss Newfoundland’s security status, industrial production and equipment needs. The American delegation’s briefing note, explaining that moving forces to Canada would ‘involve the United States in the war’ and noting a shortage of trained soldiers, asserted that if transfers to Canada became ‘necessary’, only two army divisions and an air group would be used.16 The Canadians, ‘far from pessimistic about the [war’s] outcome’, wanted no American aid that came at Britain’s expense. One cannot dispute an American official historian’s judgement that these ‘inconclusive’ meetings had little impact on US military planning. Canada had to defend itself and Newfoundland with ‘such assistance as the United States can give in the way of equipment’, although America would safeguard Newfoundland if it joined the war.17 Admiral Ernest J. King listed Canada’s security just fifth on his service’s hemispheric priorities.18

An American pollster told Lothian on 20 June that while 69 per cent of Americans fretted that a German victory would endanger America, just 28 per cent would fight to prevent that prospect.19 The isolationist Chicago Tribune proposed making an alliance with Canada, while Saturday Night magazine advised that American protection would allow Canada to buttress Britain.20 Officials in Ottawa did not disagree. As there would be ‘no possibility of our being able to defend ourselves without United States aid’ if Japan entered the conflict, Skelton thought that Canada would have to ‘contribute our share to the common pool in a way that would appeal to United States opinion’. As Washington could not ‘be expected to be willing to accept responsibility for’ defending Canada when it had no control, Keenleyside warned on 17 June that America ‘will expect, if necessary, demand, Canadian assistance in the defence of this continent and this hemisphere’.21

Hemispheric defence dominated a Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) conference convened in Ottawa in mid-July.
As even ‘pro-imperial Canadians were beginning to transfer their allegiance from London to Washington’ according to Loring Christie, Canada’s Minister to America, the CIIA, aided by Keenleyside, who had Skelton’s backing, produced ‘A Programme of Immediate Canadian Action’. As North America’s geostrategic indivisibility demanded Canada’s substantial contribution, there must be ‘a new board of strategy in connection with the present general staff’. Further, ‘such extensive coordination of defence’ would ‘require some political understanding’ as Canada and America needed to know ‘the type of political relationship that may be established and the extent to which one country may influence or limit the policy of the other’.

On 13 July, Christie advised King that FDR was pondering continental defence matters. While Major General Harry Crerar, Canada’s Chief of the General Staff, supported security talks with America, King judged that nothing could happen until after November’s presidential election. King was wrong. Deciding on 2 August to ‘sell directly or indirectly’ 50 destroyers to Britain but concerned that Congress might block a sale unless Marshall and Stark certified the vessels as ‘not essential for US defense’, FDR swapped the ships for 99-year leases of several British bases in the western hemisphere. Thus, when FDR told Christie on 27 July that he wanted staff talks and Lothian, worried that the destroyer deal could collapse since Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden opposed this ‘grievous blow to our authority and ultimately to our sovereignty’, told King on 12 August that his influence in Washington might be ‘decisive’, King instructed Christie to inform Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles of his desire to discuss the destroyer deal with FDR. Moffat then intervened. Noting ‘an extraordinary recrudescence of optimism’, Moffat thought that ‘all too many’ Canadians refused to admit that defeat was possible. By August, Moffat worried that Canada’s ambitions to field an air force and four army divisions ‘outran the possibilities of practical realization’. Moreover, while rabid imperialists, seeking aid for Britain, and leftist intellectuals, fearing British defeat, wanted an American alliance, King was hesitating. Informing State Department official John Hickerson that Canadians held a ‘spirit of optimism’ unsupported by military facts, Moffat spurred FDR to move quickly. Upon reading Moffat’s despatches on 16 August, FDR immediately telephoned King about meeting the next day to consider the ‘mutual defence of our coasts on the Atlantic’.

Arriving at Ogdensburg on 17 August with Moffat in tow, King received FDR’s proposal to form the PJBD. King agreed, but he said he ‘would not wish to sell or lease any sites in Canada but would be
ready to work out matters of facilities’. As ‘he had mostly in mind the need, if Canada were invaded, for getting troops quickly into Canada’, FDR displayed what Canadian historian J. L. Granatstein termed ‘a Rooseveltian iron fist draped in the velvet of warmest good fellowship’. Claiming that Britain’s reluctance to grant access to Caribbean bases was incomprehensible, FDR admitted to King that he had told Lothian he might grab those bases to safeguard US security. However, FDR confided, ‘it was much better to have a friendly agreement in advance’.30

As FDR told his Canadian-born aide Lauchlin Currie on 24 August, ‘at the present time the good feeling is better than it has ever been during my lifetime’. Stimson praised FDR for handling the PJBD matter ‘with great skill’. For Moffat, the Ogdensburg Agreement had dispelled misplaced fears that a Canada–US rapprochement would sunder the Empire. Instead, it would ‘bring Britain and the United States closer together’.31 King recorded ‘what had enabled us to get on so splendidly together is that we felt that the really important things in life are very simple and that all that is needed is good-will and sincere intent to effect any great end’. King cabled Churchill on 18 August to reiterate that Britain remained Canada’s first line of defence, adding ‘outside the British Commonwealth, you have no truer friends or stronger allies than are to be found in the President and Secretary Stimson’. To Canada’s Parliament that November, King played up the PJBD’s value, asserting that ‘in ultimate importance [it] far surpasses the formation of the triple axis’, while it enabled Canada to funnel more aid to embattled Britain.32

In America, the *Foreign Policy Bulletin* trumpeted the Agreement as ‘one of the historic moments in both British Empire relations and American diplomacy’. The *Chicago Tribune* called Ogdensburg the most important event since the Revolutionary War.33 Even notoriously anti-FDR media barons agreed. W.R. Hearst termed the pact ‘a beneficial thing’, while Colonel Robert McCormick, fearful that Germany could attack New England via Canada, wanted a defensive barrier erected in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.34 Canadian broadsheets, Moffat wrote, were ‘almost universally favorable’ as the PJBD was ‘a potent aid’ to win the war, a ‘reinsurance premium’ for Canada, a continental defence contribution and a boon to UK–US rapprochement. The *Toronto Daily Star* saw the PJBD as ‘a bond of good hope’ signifying Canada’s coming of age, and the *Toronto Telegram*, usually critical of King, praised the pact’s ‘wide import’. The *Toronto Globe and Mail*, calling King the ‘central figure’ in a strategic tripartite arrangement with Britain as a ‘silent partner’, named the Ogdensburg pact as King’s ‘greatest triumph’. For Bruce Hutchison of the *Vancouver Sun*, the PJBD was ‘essential’ to confront Japan’s menace
to British Columbia. Vincent Massey, Canada’s High Commissioner in London, relayed that British newspapers were ‘unanimously favourable’. Massey’s second in command, Lester Pearson, calling the PJBD ‘one of the wisest and most astute things Mr. King has ever done’, noted its ‘tremendously good press’ in Britain. The Times of London noted that the pact’s effects on Latin America and Britain ‘will be worth watching’. The New Statesman and Nation, while stating that ‘a constitutional pedant’ might object to Ogdensburg, judged that ‘continents are now the natural units for defence’.

Moffat reported on 30 August that Canada’s Conservative Party leader, R. B. Hanson, was ‘satisfied’ by the PJBD. But after telling Meighen on 23 August that ‘there could be no objection to Staff conversations’, Hanson assailed King in person for going behind Churchill’s back. King, according to Hanson, had accused FDR of forming the joint board as ‘window dressing’ to gain congressional approval for the destroyer deal. Meighen, doubting FDR had prompted the PJBD as ‘it is too much in line with Mr. King’s life long inclinations’, contended the agency was ‘not window dressing but something the people of Canada do not want’. Hanson publicly savaged King for ‘casting off old and now embattled ties and taking on new and untried vows’. The Globe and Mail averred that Hanson’s attacks threatened ‘great harm when nothing should be permitted to disturb the spirit of good-will behind’ Ogdensburg. The pact, which would allow Canada to aid Britain presently, was also a ‘tree under the shade of which our children may find comfort’. But the Toronto Telegram defended Hanson. Not only was Ogdensburg ‘entirely unnecessary’, Canadians must recall ‘that Britain is Canada’s first line of defense’. Moffat shrewdly explained Canada’s split reaction to the PJBD. Noting on 30 August that some Canadians worried that FDR would ‘drive too shrewd a bargain’ for bases, Moffat told Hull on 4 September that Canadians would forget Hanson’s attack amid the ‘jubilation’ surrounding the destroyer-for-bases agreement. Further, there was ‘no probability the Conservative Party will allow the Ogdensburg declaration to become a partisan issue’. Still, when Moffat claimed that Hanson was parroting Meighen – the latter had condemned Saturday Night’s call for cooperation with America and wanted the Chicago Tribune banned from Canada – King asserted instead that ‘the soul was the soul of [R. B.] Bennett’, Canada’s Conservative Prime Minister from 1930 to 1935. Christie put matters more bluntly. As Canadian opposition could ‘distort’ the pact’s significance and ‘imply the event represented something other than a common resolve between equals’, he deemed it ‘strange that some people should be so keen to foul their own nest’.
American opposition to the PJBD was muted thanks to previous events. In October 1939, Charles Lindbergh, charging that Canadians had no right ‘to draw this hemisphere into a European war simply because they prefer the Crown of England to American independence’, had averred that Americans ‘must demand the freedom of this continent and its surrounding islands from the dictates of European power’. Although former FDR administration official General Hugh Johnson had thought that Lindbergh had exposed the contradiction in FDR’s pledge that a neutral America would defend Canada – what would America do, Johnson asked, if Canada assaulted ‘a country of the Eastern Hemisphere’ and that country countered? – Canadian newspapers had hammered ‘Herr Von Lindbergh’ and ‘Wrong Way Lindy’.42 The American press’s response to Lindbergh’s protests had been mixed. While *The Nation* had called Lindbergh’s remarks ‘half-baked and puerile’, some newspapers, though critiquing Lindbergh’s phrasing, had said Canada’s belligerence complicated US neutrality. Christie had put things more bluntly: Lindbergh, ‘like some others in the public eye, may be a case for a psychiatrist’.43 Perhaps recalling Lindbergh, Congressmen treaded carefully in 1940. Republican Representative Roy Woodruff said the PJBD ‘smacks too much of a dictatorship to suit a good many people’. Representative George Tinkham opined that the Constitution demanded the President must submit the deal for senatorial approval. However, isolationist Senator Arthur Vandenburg ‘heartily’ endorsed exploring hemispheric defence as ‘such a study might well be of desperately important consequence to our own country’. Still, congressional partnership was essential if ‘study’ were to be transformed into ‘commitment’.44

Some American journalists opposed the PJBD. On the left, Oswald Garrison Villard accused FDR of making ‘an effective defense union with a country actively engaged in a war in which we are supposed to be neutral’. On the right, *Christian Century* magazine charged that the President had formed a ‘virtual military alliance’ with a nation ‘already at war’ which could ‘become the seat and military center of a warring empire’.45 Felix Morley, the editor of the *Washington Post*, dissected the PJBD on 25 August. Believing that it had been ‘clearly foreshadowed’ by FDR’s 1938 promise to defend Canada, Morley judged the PJBD to be ‘the most severe strain yet encountered’ by US neutrality policy and ‘unquestionably’ hostile from Germany’s viewpoint. As Canada had been ‘brought definitely into the orbit of the [Monroe] doctrine as developed by the FDR administration’, Morley predicted the end of ‘the rigidity of national frontiers in favor of a new cohesiveness in contiguous areas’.46
New world continentalism also concerned Whitehall, especially as the British Chiefs of Staff had warned on 23 July that the ‘full financial and economic co-operation of the whole of the American continent’ was needed ‘for us to win the war’. Indeed, King had vexed Dominions Office denizens in May 1940 by declining to participate in joint imperial planning in London as he could better represent Commonwealth interests ‘as a whole’ to America by staying home. It is unclear if Dominions Secretary Lord Cranborne initially opposed the PJBD, for he told his officials in November 1940 to distribute the PJBD’s first report to relevant British agencies as it was ‘of very considerable interest’. But after Secretary to the British Chiefs of Staff L. C. Hollis claimed Ogdensburg would prompt Canada to divert forces to British Columbia, the Royal Navy averred in January 1941 that Britain should reject Canadian requests to buttress continental defence. Although he told King on 19 February that he kept Canadian ‘interest’ in mind, Cranborne, worried that the PJBD constituted an alliance between a British Dominion and a foreign power ‘without any reference to or consultation’ with Britain, advised Churchill on 6 March ‘to resist the whole principle of hemispheric defence’ and to contact King to ensure that no one could ‘drive a wedge between us and Canada’. Churchill thus ‘bluntly’ stated Britain could not provide ‘complete protection on both sides of the Atlantic’.

Subsequent British policy on North American defence was somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, a Dominions Office memorandum in September 1942 concluded the PJBD ‘now appears to be more or less dormant’, having been replaced by the powerful US Chiefs of Staff apparatus. Yet in May 1943, as Canada pondered helping America to retake the western Aleutian Islands occupied by Japan, Major General Maurice Pope, heading Canada’s Joint Staff Mission in Washington, fended off Britons who, worried by the vast scale of US Pacific operations, plumbed Canada’s intentions. Malcolm MacDonald, Britain’s High Commissioner to Canada, although he said later that he had disputed London’s opinion that King was associating ‘Canada too closely with the neighbouring United States’, noted in March 1941 that there ‘may be some danger that Mr. Mackenzie King will be inclined to associate Canada too closely as a North American country with the United States as distinct from the United Kingdom’. After visiting vast US defence projects in northwest Canada in 1942–3, MacDonald’s complaints about their scale and apparent permanence spurred King to purchase those projects.

Despite serving on the PJBD, Pope doubted its military necessity, even if the actions of ‘consummate artists’ such as King and FDR ‘could not successfully be held by ordinary men to be without merit’.
the PJBD’s US section sought strategic control of continental defence, Canada insisted in July 1941 that ‘mutual cooperation’ should pertain. When American officials demanded west coast unity of command after Japan’s Pearl Harbor attack thrust America into the global conflagration, Pope, certain the threat was overstated, helped to block the initiative. In May 1942, as Japan’s massive Midway offensive loomed, Pope backed Canada’s initial refusal to despatch planes to Alaska for he believed, as did British officers in Washington, that the Americans were ‘prone to panic’.53 While praising the PJBD as ‘a major step forward’, Crerar feared it would bolster a Canadian tendency ‘to look inward and think in terms of strict “continental defence”’. As such parochialism threatened Crerar’s goal to field seven divisions against Germany,54 Crerar told Skelton that hemispheric cooperation with America should be mainly ‘naval and air’. When the PJBD’s Canadian Section pledged ground forces to defend Alaska, Crerar complained that such a promise met only a perceived Canadian ‘political need’ to accept ‘a specific responsibility’ to assist America. When Ottawa and Washington finally approved a continental security scheme in July 1941, Crerar’s views won out. While Canada’s air force and navy would help to safeguard Alaska in a crisis, the army was excluded from that responsibility.55

Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle – who had joined the State Department in 1938 lest the job go ‘to some second-rate intriguer picked from the political basket who will get us in a British alliance and a European Asiatic war’56 – had greeted the PJBD unenthusiastically. Although he had told a visiting Canadian journalist in June 1940 that he backed a North American economic union, Berle worried that ‘our own arrangements [with Canada] would thus force us either to talk with Germany [if Britain fell] or immediately declare war ourselves’. After speaking to Hickerson, Berle reconsidered. Not only was it ‘plain that the plans are made so that even in the event of a defeat in Great Britain the fleet would continue fighting in the Atlantic’, the plan was also ‘an interesting one, especially because it does not greatly involve this hemisphere’.57

Some thought the PJBD should expand its powers and geographic jurisdiction. The New York Herald Tribune averred that the pact was a ‘full treaty of mutual defense, formally ratified by the constitutional agencies of both countries, for which the situation urgently calls’.58 The Canadian Forum, claiming the PJBD was FDR’s initiative alone as King ‘was still afraid to buy a lead pencil for war purposes without authorization from London’, doubted that North America faced a ‘Nazi invasion’. Instead, the PJBD would be more valuable in the Pacific as the US
Navy ‘is the only major armed force that Canada (and Australia and New Zealand) can count on in an emergency’. Indeed, Captain W. L. Murray, Canada’s Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, told reporters that the PJBD would cover Canada’s west coast, potentially allowing for the completion of an Alaskan highway, although he would not speculate about the possibility of an American naval base being situated in British Columbia. Leonard Brockington, a Welsh-born advisor to Canada’s Cabinet War Committee, according to a bemused Moffat, ‘let his fancy fly until he had an American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand working arrangement which would ultimately include Great Britain’. Telling Pearson on 4 September that America’s interests were ‘not confined to the three mile limit’, Crerar informed Moffat in October that Britain should join the PJBD or send officers to its meetings.59

However, Hull told US missions in South America, the ‘Board was created solely for the purpose of determining in advance the steps of a military and naval character which should be taken by both governments in the event that Canada is attacked by a non-American power’. Hickerson, described by Pope as ‘a good friend of Canada about which he was extremely well informed’, was most displeased, despite Moffat’s judgement that Ottawa would not ask to expand the PJBD. Describing Crerar’s proposal as ‘the first suggestion of this sort which I have heard’, Hickerson hoped Canada would not ‘raise such a question’ for it ‘would destroy the premise’ that the PJBD was designed ‘to consider the defense of Canada and the United States from attack, and no other question’.60

King did not object on 22 August when FDR suggested just four PJBD planning priorities – Newfoundland, Canada’s east and west coasts, and procuring arms. Nor did Britain come up when the PJBD first met on 26–27 August as Brigadier Kenneth Stuart, Crerar’s deputy, believed that expanding its strategic purview would render PJBD work ‘academic’.61 Canadian pique at Churchill’s icy dismissal of the PJBD may have dampened Ottawa’s enthusiasm for a British role. As King carped to Britain’s High Commissioner Gerald Campbell on 26 August, ‘Churchill had been ready enough to appeal very urgently to the US for help and to ask my cooperation to get it’ when matters had been ‘bad’. Indeed, Churchill’s message ‘showed how much appreciation was given in British quarters to anything that did not suit their particular mood at the moment’. When King read Churchill’s telegram to the Canadian War Cabinet on 27 August and suggested ‘ignoring’ it, indignant ministers wanted Churchill brusquely informed that his words ‘had not been appreciated’. King and Ernest Lapointe agreed that Churchill had been influenced by two malign Canadians in Britain, Lord Beaverbrook and R.B. Bennett.
Further, Churchill was antagonistic towards America thanks to his ‘pride’ in the Empire. When he cabled Churchill on 17 September, as Churchill’s response ‘seemed to question the wisdom of the step taken’, King asserted that Lothian ‘had been kept aware of the conferences on joint defence’ that had produced the PJBD. Thus, King concluded, ‘the only possible explanation was that you had been influenced by representations from sources that might be supposed to reflect Canadian opinion but which, quite clearly, were either greatly prejudiced or wholly mistaken in their appreciation of the true position’.62

Canada’s High Commissioner in Canberra reported that Australians viewed the PJBD ‘with universal approval which is not unmixed with envy’, which is unsurprising as Canadian diplomats condescended towards Australians. On 17 September 1940, America’s Minister to Australia warned that Australians viewed the PJBD as ‘no less than a harbinger of the extension of the American arm of protection to Australia’.63 Australian Prime Minister Joseph Lyons had unsuccessfully sought security deals with America in 1935 and 1937. As FDR had told King in 1936, while some American senators, asked by FDR what he should do if Japan attacked Canada and Australia, favoured helping Canada, they thought that ‘Australia is a hell of a long way off’. After R. G. Casey became Australia’s first Minister to America in March 1940, FDR declared that Australia was not a direct American interest.64 FDR, however, had told King in May 1940 he would protect the Antipodes if war erupted in the Pacific.65 When the PJDB was announced, Canberra instructed Casey to see if there was a ‘disposition on the part of the Administration to contemplate similar arrangements eventually with Australia and New Zealand?’ After meeting with Welles, Casey thought it ‘inadvisable’ to seek an Australian PJBD as America was ‘largely preoccupied’ with hemispheric defence. William Glasgow, Australia’s High Commissioner to Canada, believing initially that the pact constituted ‘an offensive and defensive alliance’ against Germany and Japan, but noting the PJBD’s focus on north-eastern North America, judged that enhancing Pacific security was not contemplated in Washington.66

As a ‘public discussion’ about a Pacific PJBD ‘was unwise at present’, Berle told Casey that any future arrangement should be done ‘quickly and confidentially’, a remark Casey deemed ‘significant’. Indeed, Berle wrote in his diary on 5 September that if America could make Atlantic defence arrangements, ‘it can be done in the Pacific also’. Casey concurred.

[The State Department] would be forced to rebuff any official approaches which implied the preliminaries to military
co-operation or a military alliance with any country outside the western hemisphere, unless and until some overt action has been taken by Japan or until public opinion in this country has been moved to a state which I am quite sure it has not yet reached regarding the South West Pacific.

Still, it was not ‘inconsistent’ to ‘insist at every opportunity of unofficial suggestions for the extension of the US–Canadian talks should be welcomed’. However, Hull told Casey and Lothian on 16 September that American public opinion ‘was not ready for anything that could be called a military alliance in the Pacific’. America could keep ‘the Japanese guessing’ while suggesting ‘parallel action but not joint action’ in the Pacific. Undiscouraged, Casey told Canberra that the New York Herald Tribune’s military correspondent, George Fielding Eliot, an Australian, wanted a PJBD for the Pacific. Casey had never discussed ‘the subject of direct [military] American assistance to Australia’ even with senior State Department officials, for ‘although we have many friends in this country, there are also a great many who do not wish us well’. Americans, Casey said, possessed ‘the instinct of the horse trader’ and liked ‘clever’ things but only if they could ‘obtain a ready-made advantage’. Casey cautioned a week later that while Washington must be allowed to act ‘on the assumption that national defence policy should be based on American interests’, more Americans were concluding that an outer line of Pacific defences served their interests.

Casey visited Hull and FDR separately on 16 October. Persuading Hull was vital as he had accused Australia of ‘putting a knife to our throat economically’ and giving ‘us a worse jolt than the discrimination of Germany and other countries’. However, Hull deflected a request for an Australian officer to visit Washington to discuss naval cooperation, refused to specify Pacific plans as America was operating ‘on a week to week and at times a day to day basis’ and opposed Lothian’s plan to send a goodwill US Navy mission to Australia. The President promised to keep a naval mission ‘up his sleeve’ and wanted an Australian sailor in Washington for ‘private’ talks about ‘naval matters of mutual interest’, but he opposed broad staff talks or ‘publicity regarding collaboration on defence questions’. Still, Navy Secretary Knox thought ‘many things could and would be done that could not be done now’ once FDR was re-elected. The Americans shared intelligence with Australia and Britain and sent delegates to Anglo-Dutch talks about the South Pacific in October 1940. Australia did not get its own PJBD, while US military aid
to Australia came only in 1942 as Japanese forces loomed dangerously on the Antipodean horizon.

British historian David Reynolds has asserted that Churchill’s wartime memoirs depicted the grand alliance as a natural cultural outgrowth of the English-speaking peoples. Churchill devoted just three lines to the PJBD and he did not mention his warning to King, an omission that Britain’s official war history repeated. Correlli Barnett’s 1972 study of the collapse of British power, while savaging King’s pre-war opposition to a unified Commonwealth foreign policy, left King’s role in 1940 and the PJBD unmentioned. Two books by John Charmley about Churchill and a third by Kathleen Burk on UK–US relations also ignored King and the PJBD. Monographs by John Lukacs and Ian Kershaw noted only King’s 1940 fleet linchpin role. Matters were little better when British authors discussed the PJBD. David Reynolds’ study of the origins of the UK–US alliance contended that FDR had kept his options open with the PJBD. King’s motives went neglected beyond a comment that FDR had used King to contact Churchill as King ‘naturally shared FDR’s anxiety about Atlantic security and [his] advice would be less offensive to the British than that of an American’. Further, ‘Britain’s naval crisis in the summer of 1940 loosened the ties of Empire and helped to force Australia and New Zealand, like Canada, into greater dependence upon the United States’. D. C. Watt castigated FDR as ‘a moral imperialist on super-Wilsonian scale’ and criticised King as ‘yet another channel by which isolationist ideas could be fed to the President’. More propitious judgements exist. While David Dilks stated that King had ‘done his utmost’ to convince FDR to assist the Allies, Andrew Stewart went further. Although the PJBD ‘caused some confusion within Whitehall’s obstreperous clique’, Canada’s special relationship with FDR ‘cannot now be seen as surprising given Canada’s geography, history and culture’. British disdain for King and the PJBD was replicated down under. Paul Hasluck’s 1952 official history of Australia’s war policies devoted half a paragraph to Casey’s attempt to extend the PJBD. Not only did Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies not discuss his May 1940 appeal to King about obtaining US aid, King merited no mention in Menzies’ two memoirs even though Menzies visited Canada in May 1941. Menzies’ 1941 trip diary obliquely referred to the PJBD by noting King’s pride at ‘keeping US onside’. According to Menzies, King was no ‘war leader, possesses no burning zeal for the cause, and is a politician who possibly prefers to lead from behind’, a quotation that Menzies’ biographer cited without noting either the PJBD or Menzies’ May 1940 appeal.
to King. Casey’s memoir only specified that Hull had dashed hopes for a Pacific alliance, omitted Casey’s talk with FDR and implied that US media pressure about the Pacific had compelled his approach to Berle. W. J. Hudson’s biography of Casey, noting that Casey’s ‘natural shyness … and boyishness’ had charmed US officials, said nothing about an Australian PJBD.

Few academic studies dealing with Australia’s war effort mentioned the PJBD. Raymond Esthus’ 1964 study of Australia–US relations, while citing Casey’s meetings with Hull, concentrated on Pacific security matters. Roger Bell’s 1977 monograph, asserting that Australia was America’s ranking Commonwealth ally behind Britain and ‘perhaps’ Canada, mentioned the PJBD only in the context of a 1946 effort to convince America to join with Australia and New Zealand in a ‘tripartite regional defence plan similar to the joint U.S.–Canadian plan’. According to Carl Bridge and Norman Harper, Australian pleas for help in 1940 revealed that Australians and Americans did not yet trust or understand each other. Echoing Casey’s 1941 comment that Canada had developed a ‘poor relation’ complex thanks to US protection, David Horner’s 1981 study of Australia’s part in Allied strategy-making said that ‘King had made important defense arrangements with FDR which, if on the one hand could be described as turning Canada into an American satellite, on the other hand took care of Canada’s long term strategic interests for the next half century’. The notion that Canada had obtained special treatment echoed when David Day averred that Canada – unlike Australia, which prompted Churchillian scorn – was ‘warmly regarded in Whitehall’ and its political problems ‘met with much understanding’. As soldier-scholar John Blaxland noted, rather than being imperial siblings, Australia and Canada were strategic cousins as ‘cousins can be friendly to one another without being close’.

Few American historians have acknowledged the PJBD, an indifference exemplified by the US Army’s ‘Green Book’ official histories. Mark Watson’s pre-war planning tome did not cite FDR’s interest in Canada prior to 1940. A study of wartime hemispheric defence by Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, declaring ‘there was little of the dramatic in the story of the wartime relations’, linked the PJBD to FDR’s 1938 declaration to defend Canada and mentioned Marshall’s opposition to aiding the Allies. Stanley W. Dziuban’s Military Relations Between the United States and Canada, 1939–1945 contended that the PJBD’s birth had followed ‘a fairly well-defined pattern for joint collaborative mechanisms’. However, Dziuban wrongly claimed that King had initiated the fleet debate by sending Keenleyside to Washington in 1940. Dziuban’s lack of Canadian
sources harmed his study. Despite FDR’s wishes, no US military bases were leased in eastern Canada, a failure that Dziuban attributed to a lack of US service ‘desire’. In fact, King would not cede bases.83

Civilian American historians had mixed views on Ogdensburg. Charles Beard’s incendiary books on FDR’s alleged march to war oddly failed to cite the PJBD as evidence of FDR’s deviousness. By contrast, Basil Rauch asserted that FDR’s 1938 speech had made a desirable ‘link between the collective security system of Pan America and Great Britain’ while the PJBD had facilitated Lend Lease deliveries to Britain. The Challenge to Isolation, 1937–1940, by William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, praised FDR’s 1938 speech as ‘Americans of all stripes’ thought it eminently sensible to defend Canada against attack while the PJBD ‘came like a breath of fresh air’.84 Forrest Pogue did not mention Marshall’s opposition to Canadian talks in 1940. Julius Pratt claimed that Hull’s absence at Ogdensburg demonstrated his isolation from military matters ‘so organically related to foreign policy’. According to Gerald Haines and Chris Van Aller, FDR had exceeded Monroe Doctrine traditions by promising to defend Canada, although FDR thought he was following precedents. For Richard Kottman, the Canada–US 1935 trade agreement ‘facilitated the emergence of the joint North American security structure’.85

The opening of key archival sources in the 1970s did not encourage American historians to re-examine the PJBD. While Robert Dallek’s 1979 study of FDR’s foreign policy posited the President as an internationalist who ‘made his share of errors’, Canada rarely figured. While the PJBD ‘directly associated the United States with a belligerent and opened the administration to additional charges of involvement in Britain’s war’, Dallek ignored Canada’s motivations.86 For Thomas Bailey and Paul Ryan, the PJBD demonstrated that Canada was more vital than Latin America. Godfrey Hodgson’s Stimson biography allotted just four lines to the PJBD, while John Lamberton Harper stated that FDR’s comparison of the PJBD’s import to the Louisiana Purchase seemed ‘obvious’ to the President if not his critics. Mark Stoler’s history of the Joint Chiefs, ignoring the PJBD, said the US Army thought that burgeoning American economic power in Canada would leave only a ‘sentimental’ attachment to Empire. Gordon Stewart’s 1992 revisionist monograph, proclaiming the ‘benign view’ that the Canada–US relationship ‘was a construct of the 1930s and 1940s’, argued that war permitted ‘the completion of American hegemony in the western hemisphere’.87

Fred Pollock’s argument that FDR created the PJBD solely to acquire Britain’s navy if it moved to Canada is unsustainable given FDR’s
pre-war interest in Canadian defence, a topic that Pollock ignored. Justus Doenecke’s probe of anti-interventionists is the sole American study to note Lindbergh’s claim that Canada should not drag the western hemisphere into another European conflict. However, Doenecke said that FDR lost interest in the PJBD when it became clear that Britain would survive. In 1991, Warren Kimball averred that while Canada’s belligerence posed ‘problems’ for US neutrality, FDR ‘looked on Canada as a natural, logical part of any regional system in the hemisphere’. As Canada must cooperate ‘or face the possibility of the FDR administration imposing its will in the event of a crisis’ early in the Second World War, Kimball was uncertain whether US service demands for continental strategic command reflected ‘an understandable’ military desire to control US forces or a conviction ‘that Canada would naturally, by a sort of gravitational pull, become part of the United States’. Further, ‘in a pattern that alternatively pleased and annoyed’ King, FDR said little about Canada’s place in hemispheric affairs. Still, the April 1941 Hyde Park Declaration, committing America to buy Canadian munitions, demonstrated FDR’s readiness to ‘act as a good neighbor’. By 2013, Kimball took a different tack. The President had proposed the PJBD ‘to ensure that the United States had some control over whatever remnant of the British fleet might end up in Halifax’. Moreover, Churchill was far less worried about King’s political manoeuvres than Roosevelt’s ‘reluctant bride’ approach.

Historian Reginald Stuart has maintained that a ‘continentalist perspective dominated Canadian-American studies in the 1960s’. The PJBD may be an exception to that rule. While University of Toronto historian Frank Underhill praised the PJBD in 1940 as a welcome shift from Canada’s outdated ties to Britain, Professor A. R. M. Lower warned in November 1940 that Canada must not become ‘an American kite’ after being a ‘British kite’ for so long. Lower feared that King’s government had not widened its strategic gaze ‘far beyond the boundaries of Canada’, a judgement he later abandoned since the PJBD had put Canada–US affairs ‘on a basis of complete equality’ while King’s ‘American policy [was] an open book’. In 1954, George Stanley, seeing the PJBD as ‘a logical sequel’ to FDR’s pre-war overtures, described the Canada–US defence relationship as, if not ‘a marriage of love’, at ‘least one of convenience’. Further, only mutual goodwill and Canada’s acceptance that America’s views carried more weight had prevented serious disputes, for ‘co-operation is always more acceptable than coercion, even when the net result is the same’. C. P. Stacey, the Canadian army’s official historian, commented in 1954 that the PJBD ‘scarcely [could] have come into existence in any other circumstances’ than desperate peril.
By the 1960s, claims of global US imperialism resonated for increasingly confident Canadians who employed anti-Americanism, anti-imperialism and pro-Canadianism to label America as a danger to Canada’s ‘peaceable kingdom’. For leftist scholar Philip Resnick, Canada had submitted to ‘continental reorientation’ and US domination in 1940. John Warnock’s book title, Partner to Behemoth: The Military Policy of a Satellite Canada, conveyed his bias. Postulating that FDR had used the PJBD to justify giving 50 destroyers to Britain, Warnock noted that the PJBD was the only bilateral wartime agency formed by America with the appellation ‘Permanent’. While King thought that he had played a treasured ‘linch-pin’ role in the Atlantic Triangle, he was an American ‘chore boy’.

Canada’s right also savaged the PJBD and King. W. L. Morton, who pronounced in 1964 that Canada was ‘so irradiated by the American presence that it sickens and threatens to dissolve in cancerous slime’, had cut King some slack in 1963. While Morton condemned FDR for spurring Canadian neutrality sentiment in the 1930s, the PJBD, ‘a wise and far-sighted measure at the time … bound [Canada] to the United States as never before’. In George Grant’s 1965 polemic Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism, the villains were Ottawa’s anti-British Liberal elites. While it had been ‘necessary’ for Canada to ‘throw in her lot with continental defence’, Grant deemed it ‘extraordinary’ that King had ignored the long-term consequences given his affection for FDR, ‘one of the great imperialists of American history’. In 1976, a furious Donald Creighton unleashed Forked Road: Canada, 1939–1957. FDR, appealing to King’s ‘vain’ linchpin pretensions, had made King a ‘stooge’ willing to relay FDR’s demands to Churchill. Further, King had ‘bound Canada to a continental system dominated by the United States and largely determined Canadian foreign and defence policy for the next thirty years’. Theirs was not a relationship ‘of two equals, but that of master and pupil’.

In his last official history, released in 1970, Stacey said that FDR’s desire for the Royal Navy had put an ‘embarrassed’ King in a linchpin ‘position with a vengeance’, while the PJBD, ‘for better or for worse’, marked a new era in bilateral relations although its value lessened after Pearl Harbor. When Canada rejected US strategic control, ‘amazed and shocked’ American officers accepted a Canadian compromise that emphasised cooperation. In 1976, citing King’s 1935 comment ‘that he wanted to choose “the American road”’, while King had ‘hitched his wagon to FDR’s star’, Stacey said that phrasing demonstrated King’s desperation for a trade deal, not broader long-term policy. Stacey’s nationalist 1984
chronicle of Canadian foreign policy, acknowledging that FDR’s ‘evident special interest’ in Canada was not easily explainable, averred that such interest, while banishing the notion of America as ‘a hereditary enemy’, did not prompt King to embrace military cooperation before 1940.97

In 1975, J. L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell posited that King had used his ‘close relationship’ with FDR to forge Anglo-American ties while protecting Canada from ‘vassalage’ if America’s leadership changed. But in a 1975 book about Canada’s war government, Granatstein labelled King’s linchpin hopes ‘quaint and naïve’, while King ‘deferred to the President with somewhat embarrassing haste’, reflecting his status as ‘the junior partner in their relationship’ even if King skilfully played up to FDR. The PJBD ‘was prudent and wise’ though the lack of understanding about that choice was ‘striking’.98 Granatstein showed some sympathy for King’s conundrums in How Britain’s Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States. While King could be blamed for suspecting British motives, questioning America’s imperialism ‘was virtually impossible’ in 1940. In 1991, with Norman Hillmer, Granatstein maintained that FDR’s ‘lofty rhetoric’ in 1938 had concealed a ‘tough assertion of self-interest and an urgent request for action. Neighbourhood was no guarantee of equality or genuine friendship.’ Yet in 1996, Granatstein assailed critics for not recognising that King’s duty to defend Canada required an American alliance in 1940.99

Foreign policy scholar John Holmes reasoned that Americans had not pushed Canada harder thanks to ‘a strong conscience that restrains them from forcing their will on us’. Journalist Lawrence Martin proclaimed that ‘the FDR–King years were the ones when the bilateral clichés took on real meaning’. FDR visited Canada more than any other president, invited Canadian prime ministers to Washington more than any other president and could name Canadian Cabinet ministers, a ‘feat unheard of for presidents’. Political scientist Stéphane Roussel asserted that the process had begun years before as Canadian and American liberal-democratic elites forged bilateral bodies embodying ‘equality, reciprocity, and consultation’. Thus, FDR’s intent was to build a ‘democratic alliance’ with Canada. John A. English’s critique of Canada’s wartime policies charged that as FDR and Churchill required no Canadian linchpin, Canada was locked in an Anglo-American vice as Washington assumed a ‘grander imperial stance’ while King’s insistence on autonomy hindered the Commonwealth’s ability to balance American preponderance.100

Asa McKercher’s 2019 study of Canada’s place in the world since 1867 recalled Churchill’s displeasure in 1940. However, citing FDR’s interest in Canadian security in the 1930s, McKercher claimed that ‘whatever its
nature, the Ogdensburg Agreement marked an expansion of US security interests and a shift in Canadian international relations towards a more American orientation, developments that had already been in train.  

Many accounts have treated the PJBD as an unexpected issue that, John A. English has written, ‘signaled a changing of the guard in Canadian external relations’. But as I noted in a 1999 book, which one reviewer said was ‘the first book to focus on FDR and the Canada–US relationship’, the matter was more complicated. I made four arguments. First, FDR’s interest in Canadian security began long before 1940. Second, FDR’s pre-war comments about Canadian security were meant to compel Canada to better defend itself so that the United States would not have to defend it. Third, FDR educated his Anglophobic officials about the need to cooperate with Canada. Fourth, the notion of an obsequious King is wrong. As King asserted in 1937, a common North American viewpoint ‘was all right up to a certain point’, but it ‘should never be permitted to run counter to the advantages’ Canada gained from Commonwealth membership. Indeed, King claimed in 1948 that ‘it was the secret aim of every American leader, including Franklin Roosevelt, to dominate Canada and ultimately to possess the country’. When US PJBD officials sought closer cooperation in 1947, King agreed to it only on a case-by-case basis.

While extant, the PJBD’s import faded with the North American Aerospace Defence Command’s advent in 1958. As a Canadian officer wrote in 1988, whether the PJBD was ‘a mechanism kept in place in case of an emergency, or whether it had outlived its usefulness are questions which are unlikely to get answers either in Ottawa or in Washington’. A university undergraduate would have trouble finding PJBD references. The popular Canadian history textbook Destinies explained that King sought talks with FDR, mentioned Creighton’s complaints and noted an assertion by Granatstein and Hillmer that King sought to protect Canada and aid Britain. A second text by J. M. Bumstead opined that Canada was ‘routinely … treated as little different from Allied nations like Chile and Brazil, which had only token forces in the war’. Three US foreign policy volumes omitted the PJBD. Permanence apparently does not guarantee memorability.

Introducing their 1996 North Atlantic Triangle study, B. J. C. McKercher and Lawrence Aronsen averred that the Triangle ‘was largely a Canadian idea, conceived in the aftermath of the granting of dominion sovereignty in foreign policy following the imperial conference of 1926’. Further, the ‘idea of a tripling of English-speaking powers existing as a bloc in the swirl of modern international politics needs to be tempered
with the realization that Great Britain, the United States, and Canada had different national interests and thus pursued foreign policies that did not always mesh. The PJBD did, and did not, mesh with the Triangle. On the one hand, it incited Canada–US cooperation and permitted greater aid to Britain. On the other hand, hostile reactions to Ogdensburg revealed just how fragile that Triangle was. Still, the PJBD’s many opponents, a diverse collection riven by ideological, national and geographic differences, could not have prevented the agency’s formation. Public opinion on both sides of the Canada–US border ensured the PJBD’s ready acceptance. Moreover, FDR and King, extraordinarily skilled political operators, denied their domestic foes any legislative opportunity to derail their deal by making the pact an executive agreement rather than a treaty that the US Senate and Canada’s House of Commons would have to ratify. And while Churchill could have publicly denounced the pact, it would have risked alienating FDR just as many Britons were realising that their national survival depended on America. But once a belligerent America took its fight overseas, continental defence became far less vital. If the PJBD enhanced Canada’s gravitation into the American security orbit as British and Canadian historians have alleged, how could it have been otherwise given the dire circumstances? Would any prime minister, even Meighen, have declined FDR’s offer in August 1940 as frightened Canadians feared Britain’s destruction? I cannot imagine any Canadian leader rejecting aid at so critical a juncture.

Note on contributor

Galen Roger Perras is Professor of History at the University of Ottawa. He holds an MA in War Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada and a PhD in History from the University of Waterloo. He is a former strategic analyst at the Department of National Defence and a former archivist at Library and Archives Canada. He has had fellowships at Georgetown University, University of Calgary and the United States Military Academy. Specialising in Canadian-American relations and North American military history, he has more than 40 publications located in academic journals and edited monographs. His major publications include Franklin Roosevelt and the Origins of the Canadian-American Security Alliance, 1933–1945: Necessary But Not Necessary Enough (Praeger, 1998) and Stepping Stones to Nowhere: The Aleutian Islands, Alaska, and American Military Strategy, 1867–1945 (University of British Columbia Press & Naval Institute Press, 2003).
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The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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