

INTRODUCTION: INDIGENOUS DIPLOMACIES

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On 29 June 2006, at the first meeting of the new United Nations Human Rights Council, Canada joined Russia in voting against the adoption of a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that had been more than two decades in the making. The Draft Declaration's origins are traceable at least to the 1982 founding of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) through the UN Economic and Social Council. Having won approval by the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1994, a further twelve years passed before adoption by the Human Rights Council finally cleared the way for ratification by the General Assembly. The decision to stand as one of only two states registering a vote against adoption of the Draft Declaration should not be taken as an indication either that Indigenous peoples do not figure prominently in Canada's international diplomacies or that the country's foreign policy practitioners do not take them seriously. On the contrary, the Aboriginal and Circumpolar Affairs Division, established at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 1998, is the first of its kind in the world, and Canadian diplomats have been ever more directly engaged with Indigenous diplomacies at the UN since the founding of the WGIP. At the same time, they are keenly attentive to the growing prominence of Indigenous peoples in international fora, not merely as an issue, but as important and effectual global political actors in their own right.

All of this comes as recent years have seen an emergent body of work in disciplinary International Relations engaging and seeking to begin redress of the field's silence on Indigenous peoples. These contributions join a small but growing scholarly literature on the international diplomacies of Indigenous peoples by international legal theorists, historians, and others that is increasingly drawing the interest of students and researchers who are persuaded that an important part of the story of historic and contemporary international diplomacies has been missed with inattention to those that have been practiced by Indigenous peoples before and throughout the colonial era. In disciplines whose traditional focus has turned principally on international relations between states, much of this work has been inwardly preoccupied with broad conceptual questions raised by the discovery of Indigenous peoples as increasingly important global political actors – questions made all the more urgent by the recognition that Indigenous diplomacies are not at all new, but merely newly noticed in these fields. The result has been the opening of an as yet small but growing conceptual space within which to consider increasingly important intersections between Indigenous diplomacies and the foreign policies of states.

Proceeding from these opening interventions, the focus of this special issue of *Canadian Foreign Policy* moves from the disciplinary implications of Indigenous diplomacies to consider more directly the character and effect of those diplomacies themselves. In the articles that follow, a diverse group of contributors, working from a range of perspectives, ask what is unique about Indigenous diplomacies, what accounts for their coming into currency and their increasing influence in various global political fora and across a range of international issues in recent years, and what, if anything, these developments tell us about changes in the extant international system and the operant principle of state sovereignty.

Addressing the first of these, Ravi de Costa finds contemporary Indigenous diplomacies rooted in classical Indigenous traditions founded upon distinctly non-Western cosmologies that challenge us to rethink the boundaries of hegemonic understandings of diplomacy as well as what constitutes bona fide diplomatic practice. Often unsettling and exceeding the conventions of conduct established in modern systems of international governance, the diplomatic practices of Indigenous Australian peoples discussed by de Costa signal that to invoke Indigenous diplomacies is not to speak merely of borrowings from European traditions and practices. Though the colonial encounter will undoubtedly have left its marks to great or lesser extents in different cases, what are revealed here are practices deeply rooted in *sui generis* diplomatic traditions that have proved themselves every bit equal to facilitating and regulating peaceful interaction and interchange among peoples. As Yale D. Belanger reminds us, however, this has not been a sufficient guarantor of access to the circuits of interaction, jealously guarded by states as their exclusive preserve in the modern international system. Indeed, in his examination of the Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) of Grand River Territory's diplomatic mission to the League of Nations, Belanger recounts a paradigmatic instance of states' refusal to recognize Indigenous peoples as legitimate global political actors even when their claims are rooted in hegemonic norms and conventions. The case of Levi General Deskaheh thus stands as a salutary reminder that frustration of Indigenous peoples' efforts to advance their claims in global political fora does not bespeak the inviability of their own diplomatic traditions.

In their article, Frances Abele and Thierry Rodon highlight something of the complexity of multi-layered Inuit diplomacies that have proved remarkably successful both within and without the hegemonic circuits of global governance. Without losing sight of their uniqueness, Abele and Rodon see a core of political realism bound up with what they suggest is perhaps a more sustainable approach to engaging other communities than that given us by European diplomatic tradition. Gary Wilson discusses these same Inuit diplomacies through the work of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), elaborating the complex and multivalent relations conducted with states, with and through intergovernmental organizations, and between Inuit groups within the ICC itself. He also notes the pressure of overwhelming demands and cautions that a shift to bilateral relationships could be an easy temptation as resources are stretched beyond their limits, but that this would come at a cost in terms of what has been unique in intrinsically multilateral – and remarkably successful – Inuit diplomacies. Through cases like the Haudenosaunee re-occupation of Caledonia, Laura Parisi and Jeff Corntassel show how the inherent complexity of diplomacies that cannot be severed from spirituality and which are enacted through the multiple roles of Indigenous women raise a thoroughgoing challenge to state-based diplomatic conventions. A politics of intersectionality and multi-layered citizenship

practices suggest not only more complex but also more deeply rooted and resilient diplomacies than those sustained by the habits and institutions of the states system.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Andrew F. Cooper identify the organized hypocrisy of Canada's resistance to key Indigenous inter-national diplomatic initiatives as the Achilles heel of its desire to trade on impressions of its good international citizenship, particularly in the area of human rights. As a middle power seeking to exert moral influence, this palpable failure to lead by example is certainly not gainsaid by Canada's having found itself in the company of Russia alone in June 2006. This relative isolation has seen much in the way of its accustomed diplomatic toolkit pass to Indigenous peoples, not least the blame and shame tactics used to such great effect by Canada itself on issues from South African apartheid to the campaign for a ban on landmines. However, as the final article suggests, the very fact of Canada's active engagement with Indigenous diplomacies might already acknowledge as accepted much of what it and some others may wish to deny.

Together, these articles offer a modest call to further scholarly inquiry on a vast and varied terrain of Indigenous diplomacies whose richness and significance has thus far been better sensed by foreign policy practitioners than by academics and analysts. It is a timely and important call, and one that would not have been possible without the commitment of the contributors, and I thank them for it. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers whose thoughtful insights and suggestions are gratefully acknowledged by all of the authors. A debt of gratitude is owed as well to Whitney Lackenbauer whose input in the initial stages of the project helped to ensure its success. Finally, my thanks to Maureen Molot, Sarah Geddes, and the rest of the staff of *Canadian Foreign Policy* for their guidance, support, and, above all, their recognition of the importance of Indigenous diplomacies.
