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## New dynamic between U.S. and Canada in the new millennium

BY MIKE UNGER



Andrew Richter, left, and Stephen Randall are experts on U.S.-Canada relations (Photo by Jeff Watts)

The United States and Canada are perhaps each other's staunchest ally, but even relationships between the best of friends can be bumpy at times.

Two leading scholars examined "U.S.-Canadian Relations in the Twenty-first Century" last Tuesday during a luncheon event sponsored by the Center for North American Studies.

"Most analysis would suggest that the 2001–2005 period represents the worst in U.S.-Canada relations since the 1960s," said Stephen Randall, Fulbright Visiting Chair in North American Studies at AU. "The challenges in the relations were reflective of a number of diverse factors: leadership styles, a differing role of public opinion in the two countries in affecting foreign policy, differing views of the world, and finally, the asymmetrical nature of military, political, and economic power."

Randall examined the relationship between President Bush and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Canada's leader at the time. Following 9/11, Canada moved quickly to commit troops to the U.N.-mandated ouster of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Randall said.

"Less than two years later, the same liberal government rejected appeals by the United States to join the coalition of the willing in Iraq," he said.

This led to friction between Bush and Chrétien, but despite their somewhat frosty relationship, the countries continued to work with one another.

"If you look below the surface of formal diplomacy, the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship remained solid even through these awkward years," Randall said. "Trade remained strong, cabinet members on both sides worked to maintain the relationship while the two leaders [bickered]. I think the disinclination of the Bush administration to work through international organizations was at the heart of the [disintegration]."

Andrew Richter, Fulbright Visiting Scholar in Canada-U.S. Relations at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, pinpoints an exact date when relations between the two countries reached their nadir.

"Feb. 24, 2005," he said. "When Canada decided not to participate in

missile defense. I think that represented a fundamental change."

Still, Richter is not entirely pessimistic about the future. In fact, he describes himself as a "pessioptimist" on the subject of U.S.-Canada relations.

"Missile defense was one of those very rare issues that comes up once in a generation," he said.

Richter pointed to a small but significant increase in Canadian defense spending as a reason for hope. This year Canada will spend about \$18 billion on defense, which is double what it spent a decade ago. That's still just 1.2 percent of its gross domestic product, among the smallest percentages in the world. The U.S. spends roughly 3 percent of its GDP on defense, Richter said.

Despite Canadian objections to the way the United States prosecuted the war in Iraq, the countries remain very close. Each is the leading importer of the others' products, and they share a bond that extends beyond policy.

"The two countries clearly have common values when it comes to the goals we seek," Randall said.