

## OPINION



Prime Minister Mark Carney, second right, and U.S. President Donald Trump, right, in the White House's Oval Office on Oct. 7, 2025. Maybe Carney is playing a long game, concentrating on getting past the curse of Trump on the world before making any giant moves. Maybe, writes Douglas Roche. Photograph courtesy of the White House

# I'm still trying to figure out who Carney really is

Underneath the welter of new alliances Mark Carney is forming to save Canada economically and recover some of our strength internationally, I sense that he's holding back from boldly advancing UN principles and international law.

Douglas Roche

Opinion



**E**DMONTON—It will soon be one year since Prime Minister Mark Carney stepped into electoral politics and quickly established himself as a highly intelligent leader capable of steer-

ing Canada through the shoals of the shattered international order. Yet, despite his global stature, I find myself still trying to figure out who Carney really is, and I suspect I'm not alone.

While working to extricate Canada from the economic clutches of United States President Donald Trump, Carney has paradoxically deepened our country's military integration with America, embracing the fantasy of a Golden Dome. Though he once advised the United Nations secretary-general on the environment, Carney put his stamp of approval on an oil pipeline that his own environment minister (at the time) couldn't stomach. He holds intimate conversations with world leaders, but says nothing of consequence in Canada's Parliament.

Carney claims to have the world figured out. He wrote in *The Economist* that the international system has been "ruptured" by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gridlock at the UN, rising American mercantilism, and paralysis at the World Trade Organization—all factors contributing to the breakdown of the post-Cold War multilateral order. He sees the world now entering an era of "variable geometry" where pragmatic, interest-based coalitions will replace traditional

global structures. The "coalition of the willing," the *ad hoc* group of nations which has come together to support Ukraine is, to him, a prime example of this new pragmatism.

Carney sees himself as a builder—of new energy systems, vital infrastructure, and streamlined inter-provincial trade at home, and new international alliances abroad. He has to outwit the most irrational, vengeful and dangerous president the U.S. has ever produced. Carney wisely lowered his elbows in dealing with an autocrat who holds the power to severely weaken—if not invade—Canada. Still, the prime minister faces immense challenges as the effects of Trump's chaos spread.

Every day is packed with activity that no other politician in Ottawa faces. I have watched 14 prime ministers in my lifetime, and known many of them; I cannot recall one occupant of the office who drives himself as hard as Carney does. His schedule, as he admits, is "relentless." The strain is visible on his face. The pressure on his staff and subordinates must be gruelling.

Why, then, can I not bring myself to shout out three loud cheers for Mark Carney?

The core reason is that he has elevated military might through

arms over diplomacy as the route to peace. The entire UN structure, built on the ashes of the Second World War, is grounded on the idea that human security comes not from more arms, but from the steady infusion of diplomacy into crisis areas, economic development and social progress. By inflating Canada's defence spending to five per cent of GDP while simultaneously cutting Canada's foreign assistance programs, Carney has inverted the value system he laid out in his 2021 book, *Value(s)*.

In that book, he lambasted free-market fundamentalism for its disregard for the human condition. He warned that growing income inequality, unemployment, systematic racism, global pandemic crises, and the existential threat of climate change all stem from a profound crisis in values. Yet, in the Prime Minister's Office, Carney now concedes that the "strength of our values" has morphed into "the value of our strength."

It is as though he is reluctant to use his star power to lead both Canada and his new international partners away from the excessive reliance on military might. Carney prides himself on pragmatism, yet pushes into the background the essential idea for mutual survival in a

world increasingly tolerant of the violation of international law. That essential idea is common security, not bloc power. In today's world, Carney should be energizing Canadians with the key idea that the U.S., Russia, and China should work together—not against one another—for humanity's survival.

Several of his predecessors demonstrated moral leadership and were able to lift up Canada's contribution to world peace: Lester B. Pearson started UN peacekeeping, Brian Mulroney rejected apartheid, Jean Chrétien kept Canada out of the Iraq war, Paul Martin said 'no' to missile defence. Their courage to go against American pressure allowed Canada to lead in developing the Landmines Treaty and the International Criminal Court.

Underneath the welter of new alliances Carney is forming to save Canada economically and recover some of our strength internationally, I sense that he is holding back from boldly advancing UN principles and international law.

It is hard to feel inspired. Maybe, inside his polished exterior, Carney is searching for his true political self and, as time goes on, a more assured Carney will lead this country to more humane policies that protect both humanity and the environment. Maybe he is playing a long game, concentrating on getting past the curse of Trump on the world before making any giant moves. Maybe.

Former Senator Douglas Roche's latest book is *Keep Hope Alive: Essay for a War-free World* (Amazon).

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