



DEFENCE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR CANADA IN LIGHT OF THE BUSH MID-TERM SWEEP

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Canada's defence capacity, degraded by decades of indifference, was on the verge of collapse when the events of 9/11 jolted the United States and the West. Canada's military received another kind of reality check when George W. Bush's Republicans swept the November mid-term elections, gaining control of both houses of Congress, giving the Bush administration a clear mandate in the war on terrorism, and "casting Canada's dilemma in an even darker light," suggest the authors, professors at Royal Military College. Since it is widely considered a matter of when, not if, Bush orders American forces in the Persian Gulf to move against Saddam Hussein, the question is whether Canada will join a US-led alliance and what role Canada might play. Does Canada's leadership have the political will, does Canada's military have sufficient assets, to follow the road to Baghdad and wherever else the US-led war on terror leads?

Érodée par plusieurs décennies d'indifférence, notre capacité militaire était en voie d'effondrement lorsque les événements du 11 septembre ont fait bondir les États-Unis, et tout l'Occident avec eux. Or, les forces canadiennes ont subi un autre choc en novembre dernier, quand les républicains de George W. Bush ont raflé la majorité aux deux chambres du Congrès américain. L'administration Bush obtenant du coup un mandat sans équivoque dans sa guerre au terrorisme, le rôle que le Canada serait appelé à y jouer s'est transformé en un dilemme quasi insoluble, soutiennent les auteurs, tous deux professeurs au collège militaire royal du Canada (CMR). La majorité des observateurs estimant que le président Bush enverra tôt ou tard des forces militaires dans le golfe Persique en vue de renverser Saddam Hussein, reste donc à déterminer si le Canada se joindra à une alliance de plusieurs pays menée par les États-Unis et, le cas échéant, le rôle qu'il y jouera.

Only during times of grave national emergency have issues of defence and security found themselves at or near the top of the national political agenda. During the two World Wars, defence issues naturally assumed priority over all others. For much of the rest of our existence as a country, defence and national security have tended to play out in the background. Most discussions have been limited to debates over roles and budgets. Rarely has this fostered much interest beyond a limited circle of defence experts, interest groups, and academics. Even during the long watch of the Cold War, a war that some have called "World War III," the defence issue was largely a question of how little we could contribute to the common defence through the bilateral and multilateral alliances of NATO and NORAD.

By the late 1990s, the Canadian Forces had been subjected to stinging cuts. Military capability, measured in troops, had diminished significantly. Although in some areas there has been an incremental improvement in its

technical and tactical capability, a spate of public reports suggested that at the dawn of the 21st century, Canada's armed forces were on the brink of collapse. Arguably, the Canadian Forces are in a situation not too dissimilar to that which plagued the armed services in the dark days of the early-to-mid 1930s.

It may sound hackneyed, but the events of September 11, 2001 served as a clear challenge to the United States, and by extension, to the West. For Canada, this challenge has proved troublesome. Our anemic defence and security apparatus, battered by decades of indifference, has struggled to respond to a shadowy menace, what some have characterized as "World War IV." The security and intelligence forces strove to understand the "foe," and where, when and how to deal with it. The armed forces strained to cobble together a force package to assist in the prosecution of the war on terror waged throughout Afghanistan and beyond. Despite a growing dismay regarding the underfunded and undermanned Armed Forces, and a modest increase in budgets

over the past year, the Armed Forces will again struggle to make a contribution to any campaign against Iraq or a subsequent campaign in the US war on terrorism. As if these internal challenges were not daunting enough, the Bush electoral sweep in November has cast our dilemma in an even starker light.

The recent Republican sweep of the mid-term elections gives President George W. Bush a majority in both the House and Senate. Now, more than ever, the Republican White House can exercise its policies, its way. The sweep will undoubtedly give freer reign to a number of tendencies displayed by that administration, tendencies that have caused consternation or confusion in Ottawa. Before 9/11, concern in Ottawa hinged on the apparent rise in unilateralism by the White House. Cancellation of the ABM treaty, withdrawal from Kyoto, tensions with China, softwood lumber and a number of other issues left the Ottawa mandarin lamenting the breakdown of the “special relationship” and the faltering of the intricate multilateral matrix within which Ottawa enjoyed entangling Washington for the stabilization of the international status quo.

Living with the elephant was made more comfortable for the Canadian mouse through garnering some acknowledgment of the special relationship and multilateral ties. Will the mid-term election results change much for Canada? The fact that Washington’s voice will be less divided will narrow the range of policy options open to Ottawa. Washington’s focus is clearly the “war on terror”—no matter how uncomfortable that moniker is for Canadians. Canada’s commitment to that war warrants closer discussion.

From Canada, as from its other allies, the US expectation will be, at the very least, moral support. Whether this expectation extends to actual military support is another question altogether. Our participation in the campaign against al-Qaeda may provide an indication that there will be considerable pressure to contribute. After some prevarication, Canada did contribute to the Afghanistan campaign in a fairly noteworthy fashion. The deployment of Joint Task Force 2 (JTF-2), the Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry battle group and a naval interdiction capability in the Gulf Region was not insignificant. The fact that the Princess Pat’s battle group was withdrawn and not replaced suggests, however, that Canada’s capabilities are so diminished that sustained operations are, for the time being, beyond our capacity.

Internationally, despite the apparent restoration of arms inspections in Iraq, and Iraq’s apparent compliance, Canada might still have to consider a military contribution to a war against the Iraqi regime. Some elements of that contribution will be relatively easy to identify. Major warships and minesweepers could reprise the role they played during the first Gulf War; a sizable contribution of CF-18 fighters could also be made. The contribution the US will most appreciate and value, however, will be ground combat forces. While Washington will be appreciative of as many allied flags as they can secure (and they have used the term “many flags campaign” in the past), no contribution counts as much as ground combat troops.

Are Canadian troops up to the task? Without doubt our regular infantry battalions can hold their own with any American formation and will be welcomed at the minor tactical level. The army could deploy a lighter brigade formation in a matter of weeks if necessary; however, getting there in time is a major problem. One reason the US would not entertain a Canadian brigade contribution to the Gulf War was the inability of the Canadian formation (then with tanks) to deploy to the theatre before Desert Storm’s H-Hour. Moreover, our aircraft—still awaiting replacement smart bombs for those expended in the 1999 NATO campaign in Kosovo—would have to rely on borrowed bombs and radios to conduct sophisticated strike operations under US command. While it is clear the Canadian Forces will do whatever they are called to do by the government, they have not been given much direction or physical wherewithal to prepare any sizable land contribution to a campaign many began forecasting in October 2001. If called upon to deliver in the next several months, the Canadian Forces could only make what the Americans will consider a token contribution.

Preparing such a token force is only one of the short-term pressures to confront Ottawa. Short-term pressures from the newly emboldened Bush administration will remain “national security.” The American conception of what constitutes that national security remains debated in Washington—but now less so—and opaque to Ottawa. At one level, the US will continue to “fear locally and act globally” through both local and distant security measures. The prosecution of the American “war on terror” will strengthen its demand-pull on Ottawa.

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Canada's aim is less certain, perhaps because it does not have a tradition of focusing its sights. During the Cold War, Canada did not develop the "national security culture" that plays a large role in Washington. Indeed, Canada was largely absolved from "strategic thinking." At the outset, that had not been the case. But once the initial commitment of troops was made to NATO and our European allies, "war plans" as such were generated under the NATO Military Committee via the Supreme Allied Command Europe headquarters. For Canada, a good deal of detailed planning was only ever done by uniformed military staffs within subordinate allied headquarters in Europe, the Atlantic and North America.

One can see the absence of a strategically savvy culture in the questions framed within the Senate or Parliamentary committees on defence where the most basic nomenclature has to be explained, or when a prominent current affairs program can, as recently done on *The Fifth Estate*, refer to a nefarious, secret organization within National Defence Headquarters as "J-2," without realizing that J-2 is a generic NATO title for the headquarters' intelligence staff organization. To be stuck at the naming of parts is to be stuck at the very beginning.

Beyond rudimentary is the ad hoc nature of the Canada response options. National security, as conceived of in the recent *National Security Strategy for the United States*, entails orchestrating all arms and instruments of the government in pursuit of security. Such a conception is alien to Canada's political culture. We have no permanent organizations charged with planning and drawing together the divergent departmental responses, let alone the provincial inputs. In words that were meant to be reassuring, a spokesperson for the Canadian Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection explained Ottawa's preparation for challenges offered in the long twilight struggle ahead: "We take an all hazards approach...The measures brought to bear are essentially the same no matter what the cause." A one-size-fits-all approach may have been appropriate once.

Some might argue that Ottawa has demonstrated a culture of denial. Denial there has been, but the problem is rather that our government traditions render a bureaucracy that is indifferent to good and evil. Perhaps the greatest illustration of the current divide between Ottawa and Washington concerns the overt conceptualization of the war both parties claim to be prosecuting. Washington has provided several memorable

terms such as the "axis of evil" and the "War on Terror." One is at a loss to find a Canadian counterpart. A new term has been making the rounds in Washington and it seems now to resonate more with the thinking of the present administration. Eliot Cohen, a strategic writer of note, has coined the current war "World War IV."

In his conception the Cold War was World War III, a titanic, global struggle waged politically, militarily, socially and economically. World War IV, he argues, will also be a titanic, global, and above all protracted struggle that will engage all the energies of the US to win. From Ottawa we have a shrug. Good and evil are concepts not bantered so freely or openly in Ottawa and that is notwithstanding any debate over ultimate causes of the events of 9/11, which is more open here than south of the border.

Canada's participation in any future wars, either the continued effort against terrorism, or an incipient campaign against Saddam Hussein, is by no means decided. While the clear preference and inclination of the current government is to put off, for as long as possible, any decision regarding the commitment of forces to an American-led campaign, a decision will eventually need to be made. There is no way out. As Kenneth Pollock concluded in a recent book entitled *The Threatening Storm*, it is now a case of when, not whether, the US will attack Saddam Hussein. Short of the UN weapons inspection regime turning up nothing concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, or a miraculous change of heart inside the Bush administration, a war against Iraq seems as close to a certainty as one can get. Hence, it behooves Canada to think carefully about its response, and it should begin this careful thinking well in advance of being formally asked for a Canadian contribution.

In considering our position, there are a number of factors that must enter into our calculations. Put simply, there must be a reckoning of the pros and cons, the advantages and disadvantages, of a decision to participate or not. In other words, what will be the consequences and implications of our decision? Yet, it is not clear that the government has fully thought this through, nor is it clear that it has the will to do so.

For some time, Canada's approach to the events of 9/11, and more recently the prospect of a war against Hussein, has been characterized by a curious ambiguity. On the one hand, we seem to fall victim to ineffectual discussions of "root

causes,” as if maintaining some intellectual distance from the realities of the events of September 11th and after will shield us. The recent audiotape in which Osama bin Laden included Canada on his list of potential targets, a reverse axis of evil if you will, should be enough to convince us that no amount of intellectual sophistry will provide an effective shield. On the other hand, Canada has contributed in a not insignificant fashion, to the campaign against terrorism. Whether this led directly to bin Laden’s naming of Canada as a possible target is something of a moot point. Like it or not, we are part of the “West,” and as such, would qualify as a potential target, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Germany.

Unlike any other US ally Canada can claim to be, as declared on the Peace Arch, “*children of a common mother.*” Today, it could be argued that both nations now recognize that they are in fact Siamese twins, perhaps unique but unquestionably joined at the hip. The tripling of Canada-US trade under the Free Trade Agreement and the NAFTA has brought a new element for consideration by both nations. Whereas a generation ago Richard Nixon’s trade action threatened Canada’s economy but posed no downside for the US, the experience of virtually closing the Canada-US border in the wake of 9/11 illustrated to both nations that the arteries were vital for both economies. That fact is a new challenge and new opportunity that was not fully recognized by Ottawa. The failure to grasp the nettle of a North American perimeter defence and the taking instead of a piecemeal approach has resulted in the focus shifting to the US border with Canada. It will now be more difficult to shift that focus back.

The short-term pressures will be to demonstrate that Canada is pulling its weight in Homeland Defence by securing borders and by committing minor forces to US led interventions. The Homeland mission will prove one without end. People, transnational cargoes, and border-straddling industrial infrastructure will continue to require securing by us or them. In an ironic twist Canada may see itself climbing aboard the elephant just as the American empire makes its turn into decline. International currency markets since 9/11 have seen flight from the US dollar as a safe currency and the flooding of the euro market with Asian money. Thus the euro has appreciated against

the greenback to achieve parity, whereas the Canadian dollar, despite a booming Canadian economy, has declined. Canada’s ability to turn to Europe is greatly diminished through both the strengthening of the EU and even NATO expansion. While such expansion may have furthered US foreign policy by reducing the weight France and Germany play in its deliberations, it is not clear what Canada gained by further diluting its voice.

Speaking with a muted or hesitant voice, or offering all aid short of help is unlikely to curry favour in Washington. It is safe to assert that for many practical and historical reasons, Canada could pursue a military posture akin to Mexico’s. It is unlikely Washington would call upon, or expect Mexico to contribute to a war in Iraq. Indeed, in many senses, the US would be happy if the appendices of its empire behaved the same way. But Canada is rarely seen as just another Mexico. Indeed most Canadians would balk at the conception. Canada views itself as an international actor, and however discretionary its degree of external military activity, it has sent its troops overseas and into harms way as an expression of its national identity and to help create a desirable world system—however imperfect. That perhaps remains a recurring conceit that the Bush team may play to.

A decision to stand aside raises some troubling questions. What will this do to our complex relationship with the United States? Will the United States play the linkage game? Will it actively “punish” those traditional allies who provide all aid short of help? There can be no answer to these questions in advance. However, it may not be worth waiting to find out. Our relationship with the US is so vast, and so important to us in virtually every facet of our lives, that we run a tremendous risk if we simply stand aside. On all manner of issues, from trade to national security, we are so inextricably intertwined with our US neighbour that tweaking the eagle’s tail feathers may not be the wisest course of action, but where and by whom in the Canadian government are such calculations being made?

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