



THE SUMMER OF CANADIAN CONTENT—2011

By David T. Jones

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There have been other times in recent Canadian history when circumstances were going very nicely, thank you, north of the 49th parallel. The period immediately before the 2008 recession was such a time with record exports, low inflation/unemployment/interest rates, and solid GDP growth.

But the summer of 2011, although Canada is still emerging from the global Great Recession, has many of the hallmarks of a classic prelude leading into an extended era of political tranquility and economic progress. Such good news for Canada also benefits the United States; beset as we are with multiple domestic and international challenges, northern tranquility is a gift that needs no examination.

Thus, while enjoying the pomp and circumstance associated with the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, otherwise known as Will and Kate, during the first week of July (and present at Canada Day in Ottawa on July 1), Canadians readied themselves for cottages and summer respite (where they will ignore mosquitoes and black flies). The country is at peace; prosperity seems just-around-the-corner; the Quebec separatist threat is at lowest ebb in a generation; and Will and Kate are not yet Charles and Diana.

Thus, the following review of the bidding in this summer of Canadian content.

PARTIES, POSITIONS, AND PROSPECTS

The Government. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has entered that proverbial caution zone: “Be careful of what you wish for because you may get it.” Harper sought a majority government since obtaining Tory leadership; in three previous elections 2004, 2006, and 2008, it was denied. In each election, the subsequent Monday morning quarterback assessment concluded that a combination of a skittish electorate (fears of a “scary” Harper with a hidden agenda) and/or unforced errors by Harper or other Tory candidates, expressed in comments or actions (cuts in funding for the arts) cost the Tories a majority.

Not this time. After five years of a Tory minority (and seven overall of minority government), Harper has a majority (166 of 308 seats); although it is not a massive majority akin to Tory or Liberal victories in the 1984 or 1993 elections respectively. It is, however, sufficiently solid so an idiosyncratic action (a Tory deciding Green is his new favorite color or a sudden death) will not threaten the government. Consequently, one can expect that there will be a stable, effective government until the next election, presumably in 2015.

So what will Harper do with this majority? Will that scary, hidden agenda emerge from the Tory closet? All of the anti-Harperites are offering doom and gloom scenarios (despite Harper's flat denials) regarding his ultimate agenda on same-sex marriage, abortion law, and other social conservative concerns. My bet is no—despite well-concealed personal preferences, Harper appears content with the current Canadian social climate.

Thus, his political/legislative objectives for the near term will be those clearly announced during the campaign, including: balancing the budget; passing an omnibus crime bill; eliminating the long gun registry; eliminating federal funding for political parties; reforming (modestly) the senate; revising immigration rules, and continuing defense/security equipment upgrades.

But more than anything, Harper will seek to reinforce and expand the coalition that brought him victory on May 2nd and which he desires to institutionalize, making Tories the new “natural governing party.” Yet despite various sanguine media/observer predictions, victory in 2015 is not a slam dunk. Indeed, the May victory was a technical success rather than a political tsunami. To be sure, the Tories benefited from lunch bucket economic improvements allowing Harper to argue that he was the man-with-the-plan and urging voters not to “change horses in mid-stream.” Tories also adroitly targeted selected ridings (electoral districts) deemed sympathetic; maintained strict message control with effective advertising; brilliantly used the “boy in the bubble” device to maintain the daily message by the prime minister while avoiding the message distractions that “open Mike” Ignatieff suffered in the media, and had the advantage of running against an opponent whose strengths were his weaknesses. The prime minister cannot expect to duplicate these advantages.

Moreover, in 2015 the Tories will have been governing for nine years—approximately the “best before” shelf life of many Western democracies. More relaxed party discipline coming from the comfort of a majority can result in carelessness in word and deed. Scandal—real or perceived—can gouge away at a government’s credibility.

The Tories, however, benefit from Harper’s personal probity. He lives a 1950s morality with wife and two picture book children. You will never find him wearing Cardin suits or Gucci shoes. No woman of his acquaintance will be able to flout a semen-stained dress. In short, if the manager doesn’t chew tobacco; the team doesn’t chew tobacco. It is not a bad baseline beginning. Harper is neither rock-star loveable nor charismatic—and never will be to other than Tory loyalists; he is, however, respected, which is vital.

Will there be a relaxation of the iron control that characterized Harper’s leadership with a minority government? Perhaps—a scintilla—as long as nothing goes wrong or anyone gets out of line. But babbling to the media or personal peccadilloes will still get the errant Tory a quick hook.

The Tories will also be better funded than any opponent, having mastered the small donor tactic while poised to cut off the federal funding for all political parties. As the largest vote getter, the Tories would receive the most federal funding (at \$2 per vote), but for the Tories it has been nice-to-have “mad money” while for other parties it has been vital.

WHAT MUST TORIES DO TO CONFIRM THAT MAJORITY?

- **Balance the budget.** The economy remains the key to electability. The rough estimate is that Canada must find about \$4 billion in savings to balance the budget. Financial analysts qualify this as doable, without raising taxes, by a variety of cuts (including defense costs) that will carefully avoid health care reductions but gore enough sacred cows to generate high decibel angst. And it requires the United States not to collapse into protracted double-dip recession, let alone a depression. Still, the key for Harper is to be able to run on the slogan “I am the only G8 leader who balanced his budget.”
- **Max out the new electoral districts.** The proposed increase of 30 parliamentary seats (18 in Ontario, seven in British Columbia, and five in Alberta), as well as the possibility of a few politically directed additional seats in Quebec, offer the Tories a potential bonanza in the West where they are already strong and in Ontario where new strength was demonstrated in the May election.
- **Hold the bridges built to ethnic communities.** It may be hyperbole that the immigration minister went to 300 ethnic dinners without ever seeing a Liberal, but the Tories—having worked very hard to attract ethnic votes—need to front-and-center these new Members of Parliament (MPs) and demonstrate what they can accomplish for their constituents.
- **Compete in Quebec.** Harper flouted the traditional wisdom that you need substantial strength in Quebec to orchestrate a majority government. His majority comes without depending on his five Quebec MPs. Thus his message to Quebecers will be, “I don’t need you, but I want you.” And with a majority government, Harper can still provide goodies while opposition parties can only provide promises. Following the “Orange Crush” surge of the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Quebec electorate is in play for the first time since 1993; Tories, the NDP, Liberals, and the Bloc Quebecois will all be in the hunt for the province’s 75 seats.

In the process, Harper will seek to further cripple the Liberals. His ultimate political objective is to create a modern political dynamic in Canada between Left and Right, which he believes will benefit the Tories (a perhaps sanguine judgment as the Tories obtained approximately 40 percent of the vote while other parties, all to the Tory left, got 60 percent). Although he is often said to “hate” Liberals; a Harper intimate rejected this label, commenting that he doesn’t hate Liberals but hates their lack of principles. Budget cutting will reinforce his objective of smaller government with responsibilities focused in the provinces.

Bottom Line: The government is in a position of considerable strength, but it is not invulnerable.

REVIEWING THE OPPOSITION

The New Democratic Party. Rising to the never-before-attained heights of Official Opposition, the NDP has also accessed that “Be careful what you ask for because you may get it” maxim.

There were several stunning developments in the May 2nd election, but the greatest of these was the NDP Orange Crush surge in Quebec during the campaign’s last two weeks which virtually annihilated the separatist Bloc Quebecois while electing 59 MPs in Quebec (of 103 overall in the NDP caucus).

But everything depends on Jack Layton. NDP party leader in his fourth federal election, Layton caught the lightning in Quebec epitomizing the Hollywood commentary that “sometimes it takes 10 years to become an overnight sensation.” Prior to the NDP surge, it had one MP in Quebec and in its entire history had only elected two in the province. In this election, however, Layton benefiting from a combination of sympathy from his cancer recovery, personal brio on a popular provincial talk show, and strong performance in two national TV debates sparked a massive vote transfer from the BQ to the NDP. This move had nothing to do with the NDP political platform and everything to do with Layton’s personal touch. He was depicted as “an ‘bon Jack’”—a good guy—and easily won the vote for “candidate I’d most like to have a beer with.”

The unanticipated result was this massive, unwieldy 59 member Quebec caucus filled with the anomalies that result when parties recruit warm bodies to fill ostensibly unwinnable ridings. But the warm bodies won, reversing huge majorities enjoyed by BQ incumbents, including defeating BQ leader Gilles Duceppe, often regarded as the most popular politician in the province. These votes had nothing to do with the candidates, five of whom were university students (one at 19 the youngest ever elected to Parliament) and another who never visited the district and took a (prepaid) vacation to Las Vegas during the campaign but still won by over 5,800 votes.

The media has made mock of such caucus members. And indeed, regarding the disparate inexperienced nature of the Quebec NDP MPs, one can conclude that in a high wind, even turkeys fly. Still, it is likely that among the dross there will also be diamonds reflected in the commitment of such accidental MPs to “show them” with energy, study, and iron discipline imposed from without and practiced from within. And a substantial dollop of youth rarely hurts a legislature.

Moreover, it is possible that the NDP will be able to act effectively regarding Quebec interests. Harper will be less able to ignore a *federalist* party pressing Quebec concerns while he could blow off BQ separatists. This is a small but potentially useful plus for the NDP.

Nevertheless, it all depends on Layton—and his health. The discovery of a second cancer prompted him to select a temporary party leader on July 25, until his projected return to Parliament in September. Whether Layton leads the NDP or not, the party must balance the requirements of often separatist-leaning Quebec MPs with the profoundly federalist NDP history—and the interim leader was revealed to have recent Bloc Quebec membership as well as continuing membership in a provincial separatist party.

Initial moments following the election demonstrate disconnects as a previously scheduled party conference in Vancouver attempted to delete references to socialism from the party preamble. However, the proposal was regarded as sufficiently heretical (evoking the NDP intellectual progenitor Tommy Douglas spinning in his grave) that it was set aside for further study and thus delayed the effort to convince the Canadian electorate that the NDP is a standard, European style social democratic party. The NDP lost a further opportunity in this regard by filibustering “back-to-work” legislation for the striking Canada Post in late June. The filibuster played to the NDP union base and served to unify the entire caucus, even in an inevitable loss, but polls showed 70 percent of the electorate backed the government’s position.

Absent Layton, the NDP must now spend the summer training newbies in parliamentary niceties, familiarize them with their portfolios, and emphasize the virtues of silence. The Quebec caucus knows they are in Ottawa courtesy of Layton’s coattails and presumably will accept blunt instruction either directly or in his name, but there is no star quality Quebec or NDP leadership behind him. The other most prominent NDPer is Thomas Mulcair, the only NDP incumbent in Quebec prior to the May election. Mulcair is variously described as intelligent, charismatic, bombastic, mean/nasty, controlling, and a dangerous demagogue with an ego the size of Montreal. Nobody is indifferent to him. Immediately, following the election, he in effect called President Obama a liar by directly questioning the existence of photographs of the dead Osama bin Laden after the president had refused to “spike the football” by releasing them. Although quickly yanked back into line, it was a revealing attitudinal moment.

Bottom Line: Having caught the lightning, the question is whether they will be incinerated or turn the lightning into productive electoral electricity?

The Liberals. The election was a catastrophe. More than half their caucus, including party leader Michael Ignatieff, were defeated, and they dropped to their lowest seat total and third place ranking for the first time in Canadian history. Ignatieff

quickly resigned as party leader, accepted a teaching position in Toronto, and left town abruptly—reportedly without telephoning defeated Liberal candidates to commiserate or even signing letters of appreciation/endorsement for staffers. It drove home the Tory campaign slogan that “He didn’t come back for you.”

Liberals are still shell shocked. In an attempt to make lemonade from stone, one said “Now we have a chance to rebuild.” But with *whom* and from *what* principles?

It is difficult, but far from hopeless. The Tories rebuilt from the 1993 debacle that reduced them to two MPs. But a Liberal renaissance will be neither easy nor assured. Many of the experienced, steady performing Liberals were defeated. Prospective “seed corn” leadership possibilities such as Pierre Trudeau’s son Justin (a Montreal MP) have strengths, but distinct weaknesses. One observer spoke with contempt for Trudeau and another young Liberal, Dominic LeBlanc with distinguished fathers as reflecting dynastic politics—something of which the Middle East is riding itself so why practice it in Canada? Nor do any of the “grand old men” of the party, e.g., former Deputy Prime Minister John Manley, show any interest in trying to revive a third place party. However, a mild positive is the availability of talent from several Liberal provincial establishments, although Liberal governments in Ontario and British Columbia could be defeated by next year.

Nevertheless, the Liberals have taken the first steps on the road back, selecting Bob Rae as interim party leader prior to an official leadership decision in 2013. One observer commented that whoever is chosen, “it won’t be a university professor.” Ignatieff and his predecessor Stephane Dione suffered from the “I’m the smartest person in the room” syndrome. The upshot was that party professionals complained they listened to nobody and accepted no ideas that they had not conceived. Essentially, it all depends on Rae and whether he can move Liberal support significantly from its current 20 percent. If he can, Liberals will beg him to stay as leader; if not, Rae will step back and plan for a lucrative retirement.

Still, during this process, the Liberals will be fighting to recover their traditional centrist political position with the NDP chewing away from the left and the Tories from the right. One Liberal said privately, “We stand for nothing” (and presumably regarded it as a positive factor)—explained by noting historically, Liberals had sought to determine popular desires and work compromises between competing groups satisfying both and enhancing their political reputation. Such a strategy will be particularly difficult in the present era where there is neither money for vast new programs—such as national day care, high speed rail, or a national electric grid—nor public interest in such. Rather there is a popular desire for making what they have (universal health care) work better. Moreover, although Rae is an intelligent, adroit parliamentarian, he was a failed NDP premier of Ontario--and many in Ontario have neither forgotten nor forgiven.

Moreover, the Liberals must find new sources of funding paralleling Tory tactics to compete in a campaign “air war,” expand party membership, and energize youthful voters now more attracted to the NDP or Green movement. Claiming the problem was less fundraising failure than over spending, one Liberal said the party is eliminating heavily-staffed ancillary study groups.

Bottom Line: Liberal objective will be to regain Official Opposition status in the next election while preparing (or finding?) their next generation of leadership. Not impossible, but the historical parallel of the demise of the UK Liberal party to permanent tertiary status is an invidious possibility. The much discussed coalition of the left between Liberals/NDP will not happen soon; the NDP thinks it is on a roll; the Liberals reject a hostile takeover from their current position of weakness. One can foresee tactical alliances but no merger.

Bloc Quebecois (BQ). If the May 2 election was disastrous for the Liberals, it was even more catastrophic for the Bloc. With 43 MPs heading into the election, it was virtually annihilated, exiting with only four—and having its long term leader, Gilles Duceppe, defeated. Duceppe resigned as BQ leader, and separatists are (akin to Liberals) suffering paralyzed shock. The BQ was always regarded as an outpost/bridgehead for the Quebec separatist movement in Ottawa rather than being projected as a permanent presence in the Canadian capital. Its objective was to eliminate itself by assisting in the separatist effort to create an independent Quebec, as well as pressing Quebec interests and working for increased benefits during the interim prior to independence. For a variety of reasons, (explored below), the Quebec electorate decided to eliminate them now.

Just as the amputated leg of a frog will continue galvanic twitches, the BQ even in its rump status continues. For the next several years, as federal funding phases out, it will continue to be relatively well financed. However, just what its defeated MPs will do is much in question. Presumably, some—full of years and well pension qualified—will simply retire and/or return to private life. Others may seek revived political careers with the provincial Parti Quebecois. Another segment, however, may conclude that they were sucker punched by the NDP and decide to fight to reverse the humiliating Orange Crush in the next election, exploiting the problems that time will reveal in the NDP Quebec caucus (and its inability to deliver on implicit promises to Quebec). Will they get even or just stay mad? But the primary problem for separatists is not its federal/Ottawa wing.

Bottom Line: The BQ like a dazed mugging victim is stumbling to regain its footing. Still unable to answer the question of what happened, it will require time to determine its direction and even its purpose. Rebuilding will take time, even if its

acolytes decide the game is worth the candle.

THE QUEBEC ISSUE—A PAGE TURNS

Quebec issues have been the constant conundrum for Canada. Addressing the demands and differences of French-speaking Quebec with approximately a quarter of the Canadian population, has been the quintessential challenge of federal Canada from inception. Quebeckers are part of Canada via British conquest in 1759—force not choice—and over 250 years of benevolent albeit sometimes despotic control still has not convinced them to forgive/forget. The provincial motto, “*Je me souviens*” (I remember) makes the point every time one views a Quebec automobile license plate.

The result was an extended nonviolent struggle by French Quebeckers to gain full political and economic control over their affairs. It culminated successfully during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s when Francophones moved into key positions of power and influence, largely displacing English-speaking Quebeckers. But substantial numbers of Quebeckers deemed this level of authority insufficient; they argued that their objectives could be obtained only by complete independence. Whether they were labeled separatists, sovereignists, autonomists, or some other designation, their objective for the past generation has been to create circumstances that would result in an independent Quebec. Toward this goal, there have been two referendums: in 1980 and in 1995, the latter barely missing a majority at 49.4 percent. This outcome was particularly frustrating for separatists, who for the past 16 years have sought mechanisms to create their particular millennium, thinking “third time, lucky.”

Until the May election, the chosen path was three pronged: (1) maintain a bridgehead of separatists in the federal parliament to work constantly extracting further benefits from Ottawa and simultaneously advance the arguments for an independent Quebec; (2) win control of the province by electing a separatist National Assembly majority based on the Parti Quebécois; and (3) hold a provincial referendum that would win a majority. To be sure the, elements of this trifecta were much debated, particularly by provincial and national federalists who demanded adherence to federal laws (the Clarity Act) and Canadian Supreme Court opinion regarding the type of “clear” question that must be posed in any referendum and the dimensions of a “clear” majority. Separatists insisted on the classic “50 percent plus one” vote for victory.

Thus, on May 1st, the separatists could hypothesize that they were making steady progress toward the objective. The Bloc Québécois held 43 of the 75 parliamentary seats, and the Parti Québécois polled as the prospective winner in the next provincial election. At the PQ party conference on April 18, PQ leader Pauline Marois, having just received a record setting 93 percent endorsement of her leadership, pledged to push Ottawa every day for new powers and Duceppe, urging PQ support for BQ candidates, stated, “A strong Bloc in Ottawa. A PQ in power in Quebec. And everything becomes possible.”

But then it all melted down.

At the beginning of the federal election campaign, the BQ was the most popular federal party in Quebec. BQ leader Gilles Duceppe was the most popular politician in the province and was judged to have won the campaign’s French debate and performed credibly in the English. And on May 2nd, 39 (including Duceppe) of the 43 BQ MPs had been defeated, mostly by overwhelming margins in constituencies where previously they won repeatedly by the same overwhelming margins. Not defeat; annihilation. So what happened? There are a variety of explanations of assorted plausibility:

- They were seduced by Jack Layton, that mustached “Smilin’ Jack” twirling his cane and cracking wise in car salesman French. Layton performed well in the mid-campaign debates garnering the “politician I’d want to have a beer with” vote and ultimately judged as “an bon Jack” (a good guy) in Quebecker parlance. The result was a tribal move to “Jack” rather than any ideological impetus.
- Marois/Duceppe may have overreached in their April 18 rhetoric. By reminding Quebeckers that a BQ victory, followed by a PQ victory, would mean a return to the referendum wars, they recoiled in dismay. Having struggled with the profoundly divisive and exhausting sovereignty issue for a generation, most Quebeckers just don’t want to hear about it any longer. Yet, they may prefer sovereignty if they could get it without going through the agonizing political process. The thought of more years of “dental chair drilling” prompted an enough already reaction—and the quickie search for an alternative settled on Jack Layton/NDP.
- Years of painstaking ground-laying work by the NDP may finally have borne fruit. Quebeckers are more “socialist” than other Canadians, and the NDP (never tried by the provincial electorate) didn’t carry the baggage weighing Tories and Liberals. So, just as Quebeckers had switched in a trice from Liberals to Tories (1984) and Tories to BQ (1993), Ms. Fickle is now trying the NDP for size. And some elements of the NDP platform and leadership rhetoric (finding winning conditions to satisfy Quebec within Canada) were attractive. The BQ was never going to hold federal power in Ottawa (by definition), but an NDP government might deliver power/autonomy that Quebeckers still want. But nobody owns Quebecker votes, they are only rented.

- The fatigue factor. The BQ is long years from its founding-father Lucien Bouchard dynamism; its Ottawa leadership was grey, dutiful and pedestrian rather than dynamic, and Duceppe seemed a bit grumpy during the campaign and its debates. Everyone had heard it all before. Yes, they brought home some booty, most recently the Harper commitment to repay \$2.2 billion Quebec expended in harmonizing federal and provincial sales taxes akin to payments recently made to Ontario and BC. But there is always a “what have you done for me lately” attitude among voters (even if lately was last month), and new avenues for BQ action in Ottawa were limited.

But in honest, nobody really knows. Are Quebeckers “tribal” making a corporate decision over the Easter weekend to take a “try it; you'll like it” plunge and drink the orange Kool-Aid? Did they overshoot, wanting to send a cautionary message to the BQ rather than throwing out separatist baby as well as turgid bathwater? Have Quebeckers outgrown the formal separatist movement (analysts note steady declines in separatist votes) becoming “nationalists” (whatever that means) but not “separatists” just as they turned away from the iconic Catholic Church in the 1960s?

The reverberations have not yet even begun to settle; the election’s entrails will be pored over by the ultimate graduate student Ph.D. for decades.

Two months ago, Gilles Duceppe was regarded as the most popular politician in the province; now his future is completely in question. And he has carefully restrained from proclaiming a future direction, dismissing various media speculations, and privately indicating that he will be taking several months to recalibrate his objectives.

But three months following the election, Quebeckers seemed to have no morning after remorse. Indeed, polling a month afterwards indicated variously 40 and even 50 percent support for the federal NDP with other parties falling further (BQ at 14 percent) from their May election totals.

Is the PQ Imploding? Nor has the political upheaval concluded with the Bloc collapse. Demonstrating its proclivity to devour its leaders when they appear strongest, a number of Pequistes denounced PQ leader Marois and left the party to sit as independents. Ostensibly, their complaints were prompted by Marois demanding party support for a bill prohibiting law suits against a sole bidder arrangement to construct the new Quebec City hockey arena. Taking the position without consultation, Marois roiled party stalwarts, committed to intense discussion of such issues. But more pertinently, four hardline supporters of Quebec sovereignty departed emphasizing their dissatisfaction with Marois’ slow march toward another referendum. Marois clearly is attempting to straddle the issue with implicit commitment to a sovereignty referendum but not moving to one so quickly as to scare the horses of soft sovereignists more interested in good government than independence. Subsequently, another two other PQ left the caucus—one reportedly because the party was talking too much about sovereignty!

With draconian measures, including an unprecedented demand for formal loyalty oaths from the remaining PQ caucus members, Marois appears to have staunched the hemorrhage. Some, stunned by such action and repelled by her leadership style, declare that she cannot survive as leader. Under any circumstances, the cost for quelling this rebellion—even temporarily—has been severe. The PQ, which appeared odds-on favorite to replace the dead-man-walking Liberal government, has collapsed in the polls. Jean Charest, having won three consecutive elections (one leading a minority government) and becoming one of Canadian politics great survivors, appeared far past his best-before date. He may, however, have been gifted with a “tenth life” at Marois’ expense. A late June poll indicated that Charest had regained the lead among recognized parties. Charest has declared that he will not call a snap election, but that option remains open if he thrives in subsequent polls.

ANOTHER FACTOR FOR CONSIDERATION

That factor is Francois Legault and his *Coalition pour l’avenir du Québec* (Coalition for the Future of Quebec). Legault is a businessman and former Pequiste who, according to separatist leadership, was once a passionate separatist seeking an immediate referendum. But circumstances change; Legault left the PQ and subsequently cofounded his amorphous “Coalition.” It ostensibly seeks to assemble Quebeckers regardless of their views on sovereignty in a vaguely center-right movement to address economic and societal issues. He has been evasive on a referendum, initially indicating that it would not be held in his first mandate but later saying that he didn’t expect it within the next 10 years. This vague approach has significant appeal as commitment to anything that appears to be a near term referendum has a poison pill effect on the proponent. Legault has stated that he will transform his Coalition into a formal political party, and, polls suggest that a Coalition Party perhaps combined with remnants of the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ) could pull over 40 percent of the vote and sweep the province. Legault is not an organizer; in an election, he would be “waiting for the wave”—the same tsunami that lifted the NDP to victory. But these are early days and the primary characteristic of current provincial politics is its nebulous quality.

Bottom Line: Everything is in play regarding Quebec governance and concurrently the future of its sovereign movement. Ever since the 1995 referendum, separatists have sought to create winning conditions that could convince a skeptical electorate that a referendum would have a positive result. All concerned understand that desire for another referendum is minimal, but

sovereignty retains a baseline polling support of 40 percent plus and polling also shows that citizens of the province regard themselves as Quebeckers rather than Canadians. Consequently, BQ/PQ activists believe that “if we hold one, they will come” and appreciate that while Canada has its virtues, an independent Quebec would have more of them. A federalist contrarian, however, would note that Quebeckers are essentially satisfied with their current arms-length relationship with Ottawa, permitting them to extract benefits at minimal political cost; he would conclude that sovereignty is moving from the “sleeping dog” category to one in a coma heading for the hospice.

THE CANADIAN FORCES—WHAT IS THE NEXT CHAPTER?

As one longtime political-military observer offered, Canada must decide what kind of military it wants and what it wants to pay. It simply isn't possible to maintain a scaled-down version of U.S. armed forces. Consequently, as the Canadian Forces (CF) end their combat role in Afghanistan and transition to training police and Afghan military, it is useful to provide an assessment.

In short, the CF is back. A country that a decade ago had been counted out so far as military capability was concerned has returned to respectability. It is akin to seeing your classic couch potato arise from repose, lose weight, and start exercising steadily. Some (biased) CF observers now contend that the CF is the “best small army in the world.” While Israelis might argue to the contrary, the decade of Afghan combat combined with substantial equipment purchases—albeit most still in process—has substantially upgraded the CF. Ultimately, the question will be whether the *ancien* couch potato will return to that condition, but that is a function of federal funding as the CF enjoys its new reputation for excellence and the public support for its troops and wants to maintain both.

Specifically, the Afghan experience has created a relatively rare capability: well trained, well equipped, combat-tested light infantry battalions. There are not many nations in the world with such capability with the added characteristic of having closely coordinated and soldiered with USG forces throughout the decade. The problem for Canada is what will it do with this capability now that it has put significant blood and treasure into creating it? It is puzzling for both military and political leadership as such battalions cannot be freeze dried, shrink wrapped, and put into storage. They must continue training and exercising to maintain edge—and such commitment in personnel and funding is expensive in an era when the budget *will* be cut.

CF observers cycle between optimism and lamentation. Some fear that recalibration will push CF back into peacekeeping which they view with contempt as “one step above irrelevance.” Looking at the commitment to bring the federal budget into balance before the next election, they hypothesize that \$1 billion will be extracted from the military budget. Although senior CF leadership stresses maintaining present funding (and even expanding capabilities), such sanguine desires run onto reality rocks. Here are several areas for possible curtailment:

- **Stretching out equipment purchases.** Such is the standard approach for militaries across the globe. It is inefficient and ultimately more expensive, but it saves short-run scarce funding in hopes that later funding will be more readily available. Canadians may be looking at the ambitious projected naval acquisitions (frigate replacement, support ships, icebreaker) as bridges too far for the current budget.
- **Cancelling equipment purchases.** Again the gimlet eye of accountants will be focused on the wide array of projected equipment purchases. Is a new main battle tank a good fit with light infantry if it is not expecting to encounter improvised explosive devices? A major rocket launcher system? A light assault vehicle? An icebreaker? What balance is necessary between CF military services when the Army has received the bulk of upgrade funding during its Afghanistan decade?
- **Ending programs.** It may well be that despite its extended history of submarine operation and the acquisition in 1998 of four Upholder British submarines, Canadians will never get the subs to operate as they were envisioned. Indeed, throughout the years, the subs have rarely been in full operation—and frequently most or all of them have been out of commission. A variety of expensive, time-consuming activities (retrofitting torpedo tubes to use Canadian torpedoes) and comprehensive reviews following the accidental death of a sailor while one sub was being sailed to Canada have severely limited operational availability. The impression has gradually, indeed reluctantly, grown even among initial supporters that the subs may be lemons—just not good value regardless of their limited acquisition expense. Should Canada deep six (so to speak) its submarine program and get out of the business? Just as they ended aircraft carrier operation?
- **Reducing personnel.** Instinctively, one might think that equipment is expensive but soldiers are cheap. Such judgment might have been the case when draftee conscript armies could be paid a pittance and simply dismissed to return to civilian life at the end of their service. All-volunteer military forces, however, are expensive. Recruiting personnel for 20-30 year careers competes with civilian professions (without the deterrent of “unlimited liability” endangering their lives). So the armed forces must budget not just for present day salaries, but also for the amenities required to maintain soldiers' families and pensions following retirement. As there is no expectation of returning to conscription, Canada must continue to balance its reserve force (and currently there are approximately 11,000 full time reservists) with active duty personnel at approximately 68,000. One

can easily expect draw downs in what is already a small force compared with Canada's population of over 34 million.

- **The F-35 Fighter.** From one optic, the F-35 is a standard, next-generation replacement for aging F-18s which are running out of lifetime for their airframes. Such is a normal albeit expensive development in 21st century armed forces and usually directed by military requirements. Thus, for most professionals, F-35 acquisition is the ticket for participation in high tech aircraft operations for the 21st century, as stealth capability will be necessary for combined operation with other NATO members. A discordant note was struck by another observer who concluded that the F-35 was “the F-5 of this generation,” that is, a less than top-of-the-line aircraft but one the United States wanted allies to purchase while avoiding selling F-22s, which incorporate the most advanced technology.

In Canada, however, the projected purchase of 65 F-35s, which was a single-source, not competed decision, at a much debated cost (basic estimate being \$9 billion plus annual maintenance) became a significant factor in the May election. Opposition parties pounded the Tory preference for “jets and jails,” in contrast to a full range of social services they touted. Their extended refusal to provide detailed accounts of the projected expenditures was a factor in the Opposition-crafted, unprecedented parliamentary censure of the Tories. Although the Tories ultimately provided figures of jets/jails expenditures, it was insufficient to placate the Opposition (and, it is a rare construction program or acquisition that comes in at budget and on time).

The challenge for resisting cuts is that CF *returned* \$1.5 billion in unspent funds last year (and also returned funds the previous year). Although there are explanations, there are no excuses for failing to spend appropriated funds. The impeccable logic from budgeteers is that “If they didn’t spend it, they don’t need it.”

Bottom Line: The Canadian Forces are in the best condition professionally they have been for over a decade. They have regained “corridor cred” at NATO reflected in a Canadian named as commander for NATO’s action to enforce the no fly zone over Libya. The questions for the CF are not for today or tomorrow, but for the coming decade when the many commitments embodied in the “Canada First” defense strategy encounter the balance-the-budget imperatives that are current political reality.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE UNITED STATES?

Not much. The United States can anticipate benefiting from a Canadian government with four-year-stability. It will be able to make decisions and anticipate they will stick. Not that we expect dramatic reversals, e.g., participation in continental ballistic missile defense, but long pending issues such as intellectual property rights should be resolvable. Likewise, we can hope for progress on continental perimeter security with its obvious economic benefits and the sociopolitical advantage of lessening intrusive security at the U.S.-Canada border.

We can anticipate solid military-to-military cooperation as the U.S. government is eager to assure that those elite light infantry battalions maintain their effectiveness by an open-door policy for joint training and education, among other options.

Moreover, if Quebec remains quiescent, Washington has no need to revise its existing mantras regarding the virtues of a strong and united Canada that is a good friend of the United States. We certainly will not be offering gratuitous comment on sovereignty.

And finally, the Kate and William show came to the United States after auditioning in Canada. We enjoyed their celebrity without having to ponder ending the political relationship with the Throne. Been there; done that; revolution over—now we can enjoy how nicely the UK presents its remnants of Empire.

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