



Canada and the New American Empire:

Implications for Security Policy

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Introduction

This briefing note addresses the challenges and choices facing Canadians in the area of security. The analysis begins by introducing three working assumptions (and related predictions) about the domestic and systemic imperatives that will compel American leaders to become increasingly addicted to security and public safety. Section two explores the consequences for Canadian choices, with specific emphasis on Ottawa's evolving addiction to security by proxy and the rising economic and political risks (and costs) of adopting either one of two competing approaches to Canada-U.S. integration – proximity vs. distance.

1. Working Assumptions and Predictions

1.1. Inevitability of High Impact Terrorism

The first and arguably most important assumption underpinning the analysis to follow is that the United States will suffer the physical and psychological trauma of additional (and potentially more disturbing) terrorist attacks in the future. To assume instead that the U.S. has the capacity (or the international and domestic political support) to implement policies that are robust enough to solve the terrorism problem is excessively optimistic and dangerously short-sited. The capacity to inflict unacceptable levels of pain and suffering on larger numbers of targets and people is spreading to more groups and individuals with an unlimited number of grievances they want resolved. War is becoming privatized (Nye 2004)¹ as a result of the democratization of technology and knowledge (Friedman, 2001),² miniaturization of weaponry and lethality, increased accessibility and transferability of weapons of mass destruction, and a rising number of prospective terrorists with religiously entrenched motivations to terrorize. In addition to these trends, political power is becoming privatized -- the train bombings in Madrid in March, 2004, transformed the outcome of a democratic election and led to the immediate withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq. The Philippine government withdrew their troops in July, 2004, in response to the kidnapping of a single truck driver. These successes were initiated by a relatively small group of terrorists but they reveal a measure of political power and influence that exceeds that of hundreds of thousands of anti-war protesters in Spain and the Phillipines who demanded the same outcome, but failed. These successes (and others to follow) virtually guarantee more kidnappings and bombings will occur in the future as insurgents and terrorists attempt to build on these victories.

1.2. Systems Determine Foreign and Security Policies, not Leaders

Structural features of the international system determine the security priorities and strategies of major powers; leaders do not. By way of illustration consider the following excerpts from the Centre for Global Studies' Project Rationale for this conference:

The election in November 2004 amounts to a referendum on one of the most radical Administrations of recent history.... (Canadians) will be directly affected by the results, especially if an activist Bush administration is re-elected. ***Even if a Democrat wins***, however, the ***disparities in power*** between the United States and other countries will still exist. The rhetoric from Washington may soften, but the ***commitment to underlying national interest is unlikely to lesson***....Canada's need to develop a creative response to

1 Joseph S. Nye "Divided We War". Globe and Mail (March 24, 2003). See also Joseph Nye "Before War". Washington Post (March 14, 2003).

2 Thomas Friedman (2002) Lexus and the Olive Tree

this broad assertion of American power will be heightened if George Bush is re-elected, ***but given American's current sense of vulnerability, even a Democratic President*** will be difficult to deal with (emphasis added).

Included in these assertions are two competing assumptions about the origins of national interests and the foreign and security policies they engender, but the underlying arguments and related implications are rarely pushed to their logical conclusions. This is not an insignificant debate; in fact, it should be the point of departure for any discussion of the future of Canadian security. Ottawa's choices in a post-9/11 world are directly related to whether *systems* or *leaders* are more or less relevant in a Canadian, American and/or Canada-U.S. context.

My own view begins with a very strong conviction that security and public safety are the overarching (indeed primordial) national interests of any liberal democratic leader. This is not to suggest that democracies will relentlessly prioritize security at every opportunity. Complacency is expected in security-abundant systems (e.g., the post-Cold War decade) as attention shifts to other demands, but it is the system that determines these priorities, not the person in power. Despite obvious idiosyncratic, intellectual and ideological differences between Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, for example, both leaders were plagued by an unhealthy level of complacency in a post-Cold War system. However, in security-deficient periods, such as the post-9/11 decade, security is expected to trump everything. This will become increasingly evident after the next and subsequent attacks on U.S. soil.

Washington's priorities are largely pre-determined by the opportunities and constraints imposed on American leaders by structural features of the international system – namely, the distribution of capabilities and influence among major powers, the scope of their competition over economic and political self interests, the strength of military and political alliances and coalitions, and, most importantly, the nature of evolving global and regional security threats (e.g., extremism, terrorism and WMD proliferation). These systemic conditions also play a significant role in determining whether a state's foreign and security policies succeed or fail. Ascribing a high level of control, influence, blame or credit to any individual leader, including the American president, may be comforting to those who believe that a change in regime is sufficient to resolve whatever crisis the U.S. is experiencing, but the reality of international politics is never this simple, and never that easy to fix.

1.3. America's Addiction to Security

The American public's pain threshold (i.e., the number of casualties, damage and psychological trauma U.S. citizens are willing to accept) is decreasing, paradoxically, at a time of skyrocketing expenditures on security and public safety. In a post-9/11 world, a world in which the U.S. government has invested billions of dollars to make Americans more secure at home, billions more to fight two major wars (one without the support of key allies), and billions more to mount two of the most comprehensive post-war reconstruction efforts in history, even small attacks on American soil today will be viewed by the public as unacceptable failures. This, in turn, will generate enormous public pressure to do more, provoke disproportionate responses from Washington to re-establish the public's sense of security, and encourage a prolonged competition between political parties to convey to American citizens that they are more committed to their protection.

The post-911 international system is in the early stages of a profoundly important transformation we are only just beginning to appreciate and understand. Washington will continue to spend

billions to achieve *perfect security*, because that goal is the only acceptable benchmark for success in the eyes of the public. And American politicians get it -- regardless of the political party in power, officials will become politically dependent on, and increasingly addicted to, a set of priorities in which security trumps everything.³ The addiction will take hold for the following reasons: spending will never be sufficient to achieve absolute success in the war on terror; small attacks will provoke a disproportionate reaction to demonstrate to both domestic and international audiences (friends and foes) that Washington will not relent in its effort to make Americans safe; failures/losses will always loom larger than successes/gains in an un-winnable war against Islamic terrorism; and it will take that much more effort, after each attack, to demonstrate a clear commitment to stop the pain. The American public will continue to demand a level of security the government will be increasingly incapable of providing. And in an interdependent, globalizing world, the ripple effects of a superpower's responses will continue to shape and transform the international system, and Canadian priorities, for decades.

1.4. Rising Costs and Risks of Exclusive Reliance on Multilateral Security

There is no disagreement in Washington today regarding the most important threats facing the U.S. – everyone understands who the enemy is and what the challenges are. But unlike the Cold War where shared perception of a Soviet threat guided collective (multilateral) strategies, threats today are many and varied. Few states share the same security concerns at the same time, or assign identical priorities (and related expenditures) to various responses. Unlike most Americans, for example, a significant majority of the public in Canada, France and Germany are not as concerned about Islamic terrorism (at least not yet), and do not share the same motivations to respond. Nor are officials in these states as concerned about the implications of failure in Iraq – what better way to illustrate the obvious deficiencies with ‘unilateralism’ and, by extension, the importance of Canadian, French and German support in a post-9/11 world?

As former allies begin to assign different weights to competing security threats, their priorities and responses are expected to diverge as well. There is nothing new or necessarily wrong with this tendency. But in a security-deficient environment, U.S. officials will inevitably feel more threatened by the institutional constraints imposed on its actions by other powers who don't share the same obligations to respond to WMD threats or Islamic terrorism. The more serious the security threat, the less likely it is that U.S. officials will accept the constraints imposed on Washington by exclusive reliance on multilateral consensus.

This is not meant to imply that Canada's relentless endorsement of multilateral approaches to security is misguided. As I have argued elsewhere, multilateralism, in theory, has features that make it particularly well suited to addressing contemporary threats posed by globalized terrorism and proliferation. Obviously, multilateral approaches to gathering and coordinating intelligence on terrorist activities and recruitment efforts, or tracking terrorist fund raising and other financial activities, or establishing common airline security measures, or sharing the costs of counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, etc. are likely to be more efficient and cost effective than trying to do these things alone. As far as these relatively straightforward (and risk free) strategies go, of course, the U.S. is perhaps the most committed, active and successful multilateralist around. “But the more relevant question is whether the kind of multilateralism we have managed to create in the world today is, with all of its deficiencies, capable of addressing every single

3 Frank P. Harvey (2004) “Addicted to Security: Terrorism and the Inevitability of American Unilateralism.” International Journal.

challenge posed by globalized terrorism and proliferation?”⁴ Does *exclusive* reliance on contemporary multilateralism hold the most promise for managing and resolving every security challenge, especially if perceptions of core security threats continue to diverge? “Listing the ‘potential’ benefits of multilateral cooperation is often held up as proof that multilateralism is essential, but proponents of this view need to distinguish the multilateralism of our dreams (theory) from the multilateralism of contemporary international politics (practice).”⁵ Exclusive reliance on multilateral consensus is becoming less likely today, because the political and economic consequences of any security failure are simply too high.

Canadians often forget that Americans are not alone in their penchant for occasional unilateralism. Consider for example recent decisions by Spain and the Philippines to withdraw troops from Iraq in response to terrorist attacks and kidnappings. Notwithstanding the fact that these decisions will seriously undermine multilateral efforts to demonstrate resolve or to mount a credible multilateral response to terrorism and post-war reconstruction in Iraq,⁶ officials in these states felt compelled for very personal, state-centric, unilateral reasons to break with coalition priorities. Officials in Madrid and Manila continue to vigorously defend their decisions, but the stronger and more credible their defence the more obvious the challenges for successful multilateralism in a post-9/11 war on terror.

2. Choices for Canadians

2.1. Key Choices: The Security of Economics vs. The Economics of Security

The 2004 Auditor General’s report on Canada’s contributions to security after 9/11 summarized Canadian priorities in terms of a profound sense of “economic insecurity” resulting from “heightened border security” and the “shutdown of civil air transport”.⁷ While Americans are very worried about another attack, the strategic calculations in Canada remain focused on preventing or mitigating the economic consequences of America’s response. This is entirely understandable given our economic dependence on the U.S. -- 43% of our wealth; 87% of our trade; 35,000 trucks and 500,000 individuals cross the border every day; etc. Billions of dollars tied to Canada-U.S. trade were lost as a direct consequence of 9/11, and despite the obvious economic benefits to both countries of keeping the border open there is no reason to expect a different outcome after the next attacks.

Liberal internationalists are correct about the long-term effects of economic interdependence on Canada-U.S. relations -- mutual vulnerabilities and sensitivities created by expanding levels of North American trade should produce a balance of interests and of bargaining leverage. But these patterns usually apply in security-abundant environments when absolute gains from economic integration are sufficient to maintain a relatively stable relationship. In security-deficient environments, on the other hand, the confusion and anxiety following the next and subsequent attacks will force Washington, in the midst of the ‘fog of war’, to initiate a set of

4 Frank p. Harvey (2004) Smoke and Mirrors: Globalized Terrorism and the Illusion of Multilateral Security. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

5 Ibid.

6 The day after the Philippine military departed, seven new hostages were taken, including an Egyptian diplomat, two Kenyans and four aid workers from India.

7 Auditor General Report (2004) National Security in Canada: The 2001 Anti-Terrorism Initiative -- (p.3)

patterned responses (e.g., border closures) that will seriously jeopardized Canada-U.S. economic activity. Regardless of the mutual benefits of two-way trade, these and other economic interests will be sacrificed at the altar of homeland security every time. The *economics of security* (the negative economic impact of security failures) will invariably trump the *security of economics* (the positive impact of sound economic policies) for at least two reasons: “First, any terrorist attack on U.S. soil will inevitably have a major, immediate and uniformly negative impact on the American (and international) economy anyway. Second, in a security-conscious society faced with the challenge of perfection in the war on terror, the loss of 3,000 lives will invariably be perceived by the American public as a far more significant tragedy than the loss of 300,000 jobs. Conversely, the potential to save 3,000 lives will be perceived as far more important than the potential to create 300,000 new jobs.”⁸

2.2. Vanishing Choices: Canada’s Addiction to Security by Proxy

If economic security is far more important to Canada than it is to the U.S., then Canadian officials will need to find ways to influence the standard operating procedures the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is currently developing to deal with various contingencies and scenarios. The key challenge for Canada will be to prevent Washington from relying exclusively on a set of patterned, unilateral responses after each attack that are likely to run counter to our interests. In order to acquire at least some indirect input into Washington’s post-attack crisis management techniques, Ottawa will become increasingly dependent on policies that make our commitment to American security crystal clear and unambiguous.

But, like Washington, Ottawa will inevitably confront a critical paradox in its efforts to become a credible partner in homeland security. Immediately after the next attack, the American public will dismiss as failures every security program, policy and expenditure put in place since 9/11. Washington will then look for more meaningful contributions from Ottawa regardless of whether Canada’s \$8 billion security investment has helped. Perceptions of security are never based on how many lives are saved by successful counter-terrorism programs but on how many lives were lost in an attack that no one anticipated. More importantly, the public will typically perceive a greater loss in security from a minor attack that killed dozens of people than a corresponding gain in security from successfully preventing a major attack that would have killed thousands. The most difficult (and perhaps unachievable) challenge facing political officials in the war on terror is to shape the public’s perceptions of success and failure. Ottawa will confront the same pressures to satisfy unachievable benchmarks for success. The next attack will provoke a corresponding increase in demands from Washington to do more for security in an environment in which successes will become increasingly difficult to demonstrate. In sum, Ottawa will be incapable of spending enough to convince Americans that our commitment to their security is reliable, and the Canadian economy will suffer as a consequence.

2.3. Costly Choices: Canada-U.S. Integration and the Proximity-Distance Debate

Canada’s Prime Ministers have always faced the difficult task of balancing two competing approaches to Canada-US integration – proximity vs. distance. The challenge today is to find the right balance in the context of constantly changing domestic and external circumstances. But in a security-deficient environment plagued by mutually reinforcing addictions to public safety and homeland defence, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Ottawa to maneuver between the two options. The search for an ideal equilibrium point is more complicated today because the

8 Harvey (2004) Smoke and Mirrors.

political and economic risks of moving towards either option are increasing simultaneously. Proximity is risky because America's addiction to security has forced Washington to select strategies that are unappealing to a majority of Canadians who remain committed to the promise of multilateral security. Distance is risky, because anything less than a crystal clear commitment to American security will affect Washington's enthusiasm, after the next attack, for protecting Canadian economic interests. Ottawa is being pressured to maintain a healthy, sovereignty enhancing distance from the U.S. at the very time when proximity, interoperability, security coordination and intelligence sharing are becoming more important to both the United States and Canada.

The challenge for Paul Martin (and Prime Ministers to follow) will be to convince a majority of Canadians that integration does not undermine Canadian sovereignty simply because it forces Ottawa to coordinate policies with Washington – coordination isn't always a bad thing, despite the common refrain from critics. Integration undermines Canadian sovereignty when it prevents Ottawa from protecting and enhancing the country's core values and interests. Efforts to maintain distance from Washington simply for the sake of distinction fail on both counts.

2.4. Perfect Choices: Afghanistan and Canada's National Security Policy

As the Prime Minister attempts to search for a risk free balance between distance and proximity, Canada's ongoing contribution to Afghanistan will emerge as the ideal deployment for the Canadian forces. Several reasons explain the appeal of our sustained commitment to the region. First, despite the fact that the two operations are virtually indistinguishable, Afghanistan is not Iraq. Canada's decision to avoid participation in the Iraq war (as distinct from opposing the war) has come to define Canadian sovereignty, autonomy and independence from the U.S. That choice is now an important part of our post-9/11 identity and will remain a point of departure for speeches by almost every Canadian official for a long time. But, for many of the reasons outlined above, Canada does not have the luxury of staying out of the war on terrorism all together. Our ongoing contribution to security, development and democratization in Afghanistan through Operation Apollo (Canada's naval deployment in the Arabian Gulf) and Operation Athena simultaneously accommodates our addictions to 'security' and 'distinction' by striking the ideal equilibrium between 'distance' and 'proximity.' Canadian troops are performing functions in Kabul that are closer to the peacekeeping end of the conflict spectrum, while the U.S. is fighting an offensive war against remnants of Al-Qaeda and the former Taliban regime in the mountains along the Afghan-Pakistan border. This distinction feeds Canada's perception of our peacekeeping niche while fulfilling a role Washington considers essential in the war on terror. Doing less is too risky, and doing more is too costly.

Second, a reasonably straightforward linkage can be drawn between Canada's contributions to security in Afghanistan and our traditional commitments to, for example, peacekeeping and humanitarianism, democratization, foreign aid and development assistance to failed and failing states, and Canada's national security policy, all combined into a single, cost-benefit maximizing, value driven deployment.

Finally, a sustained commitment to Afghanistan through a UN sanctioned, NATO sponsored International Security and Assistance Force satisfies a strong preference Canadians have for multilateral operations with our European allies. Just as our commitment to the Balkans served as the template for expeditionary operations and post-war reconstruction efforts throughout the '90s, Afghanistan will serve as the new template for Canadian operations in a post-9/11 world.