

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES FOR THE CAMPAIGN

Canada has important foreign policy choices to make; even no policy is in fact a kind of policy. Is it too much to hope that the election in this country will include debate on the major international issues facing Canada? Probably. Is it because there are no issues on which the choice of Canadian policy really matters? Definitely not. Is it because most Canadians simply are not interested? Maybe. That is worrisome. We seem less engaged than in the past.

That has to change. Canadians have to wake-up and pay attention to what is happening in the world. Canada's security and prosperity are both of critical importance, and both are significantly impacted by what is happening in the world, for better or for worse. This makes them election issues.

The Canadian election overlaps the American election. In the latter, foreign policy issues are already obviously very important – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to name some of the most obvious issues. There are differences of view between the two presidential candidates that are already apparent. They will be debated. This is how a democracy is supposed to work.

Both Senator Obama and Senator McCain have made clear that climate change will be a major priority for them. While the policies of the Democrats are more detailed and convincing than those of the Republicans, there is no reason to doubt that the United States will start working much more actively than during the Bush Administration to limit future greenhouse gas emissions. There will be a spurt of technological development. Canada will no longer be able to hide behind the differences amongst the major economies of the world. We need to hear in more detail how the political parties in Canada intend to deal with this challenge globally. And we need to ensure that we will be able to compete with the green technologies of the future.

Climate change policy is, of course, in significant part a function of energy policy. Despite the increasingly apparent determination of both presidential aspirants to reduce dependence on oil and on suppliers from the Middle East, this does not mean that there will be a bigger welcome mat for enhanced exports from Canada's tar sands. The carbon footprint and more generally the environmental impact of this oil have many critics. Canada should be a leader in the global efforts to find a "deal" that will be much more effective than Kyoto.

The likelihood is that the United States will not only talk about the need for a more multilateral approach but, to a lesser degree than the talk, actually walk in that way. Both McCain and Obama are conscious of the need to act in the company of other like-minded states. But there is a major difference between the two.

Senator McCain has argued for the creation of a "League of Democracies" and suggested Russia should be dropped from the G8. Senator Obama has been much more inclined towards bringing the leaders of the key countries to deal with an issue – in particular that of climate change – together, regardless of their political system.

In fact Prime Minister Harper has also indicated interest in bringing together the democracies of the world. There are serious problems with the McCain/Harper

approach. If one wants to break global deadlocks, one has to engage all the key players. It is not sufficient just to include in the inner sanctum leaders of those countries with whom one is most ideologically comfortable.

There is another problem as well. The world's largest democracy – India – has made clear it wants no part of being in such a group. The Indians see it for what it is – highly divisive. And India is not alone as a democracy in rejecting this idea. Plus, one can easily think of further problems. Who decides which countries are democracies, or when a country has stopped behaving democratically? Think a little about how one would deal with Pakistan today. Or Egypt. Where should Canada stand?

The Olympics have underlined the tremendous strides being made by China. The infrastructure, design and organization of the Games were very impressive. China is much more than a low cost producer of goods. China is increasingly a leader – in some areas positively and in a few negatively (such as production of greenhouse gases). There is slow progress being made in controlling corruption and democratization, essentially at the local level, and in respect for human rights, but it is indeed slow.

The reality, however, is that China must be engaged in the world and its governance. The neglect of China by the Canadian Government is a huge mistake, one for which Canada is paying a high price. Moreover, as a country strongly committed to a multilateral rules-based system, we are working against ourselves; it is in our interest to bring China as much as possible into that system. Where should Canada stand?

Russia is back. As a matter of fact, global geopolitics is back. History has not ended. Indeed some would say not all that much has changed from the classic days of great power politics. While some countries genuinely want to see a world where human security is a top priority, there are a great number which at best give lip service. And, of course, there are more actors (not only states), more interdependence and more integration of foreign and domestic policies.

While global integration is a reality, so is fragmentation. US Vice-President Cheney calls for Georgia to be in NATO (complete with the Article 5 commitments to come to its defence if attacked – are we OK with this?). Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega calls for recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Does that sound familiar?

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were indeed extraordinary events that few could foresee. How did Canada and its NATO Allies respond? Through the reunification of Germany and the enlargement of NATO into Eastern Europe.

Yugoslavia also collapsed during this period. The Russians have always been very close to the Serbs, but had to swallow major NATO involvement which ultimately led to the break-up of Serbia and the creation of Kosovo. Over the last few months, debate has turned as to whether the time has come to admit the Ukraine (and Georgia) into NATO, and install a missile defence system in Poland. The latter has now been agreed by the Polish Government

The recent crisis in Georgia shows one can corner the bear – for a period – but then be ready for action, indeed vindictive action. Arms controllers call it “breakout”. Prime Minister Putin is proud of his country, and like so many of his countrymen feel they have been pushed around several times too many over the last two decades as a

consequence of their weakness. So what we now see is Russia asserting its power in its neighbourhood –in fact in an entirely predictable way. Where should Canada stand?

Canada has interests in the world. These interests should be advanced by Canadian policy. The substance of that policy needs to be debated. For that debate to occur, the public needs to demand responses from our political leaders.

There are major issues at stake here. Canada is a player. We are a member of NATO. Moreover we are in good standing as a consequence of our extraordinary efforts in Afghanistan. We are a member of the G8, with something to say about the wisdom of pushing Russia out – a mistake – or enlarging the G8 to better reflect global geopolitics – inviting China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa in which is a good idea.

Nobody wants to go to war, or even replay the Cold War. That means we need policies on the future of NATO. We also need policies on how we deal with Russia, a relationship that takes on new dimensions with the Arctic thaw and the increased accessibility of natural resources in the North. Ottawa should be providing leadership in the development of such policies. Where should Canada stand?

Afghanistan is, of course, very much in the news. The Conservatives and the Liberals seem, however, to have found a modus vivendi actually to avoid debating Canadian policy towards Afghanistan. Both see full debate to be excessively risky. Maybe this will change during the next few weeks. It should.

There is a vague sense in the country that by 2011 Canadian military involvement in Afghanistan will be very substantially, if not entirely, ended. The reality is the war is not going at all well. This fact is acknowledged much more openly in Washington, London and Paris than it is in Ottawa. The number of Taliban attacks, the number of allied forces killed, the number of Afghan civilians killed, the slow pace of economic progress, and the location of Taliban attacks all point to a strengthening of the insurgency.

There is little question that the Taliban has rebuilt itself, using the sanctuary provided by the tribal areas in Pakistan. Indeed there is no debate that Pakistan has aided this rebuilding by not controlling the frontier areas adequately and not aggressively going after bases being used for training.

In fact the situation is worse than this. Not only has the Taliban been significantly rebuilt, but also there are more foreign born jihadists working with them. The ambitions of these people go well beyond the reassertion of Sharia law in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan are increasingly becoming (again) a base from which attacks can be launched anywhere in the world.

So if NATO and its associates withdraw, it would be a grave error to think the consequences will be limited to the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. Moreover, what does Canada say to those Afghans who have worked with us (interpreters, for example) and the people we have helped (young girls entering school) as we leave? Good bye and good luck?

It seems clear that the next US President will be making a strong call for additional efforts in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces have done us proud. Canada's reputation is very high. While we may not be able to contribute substantially more troops, it is difficult

to imagine contributing substantially less. Despite this it is far from clear the war can be “won.” It is clear the Canadian Government had an inadequate understanding of the war in Afghanistan when we agreed to commit. Today we are where we are – Monday morning quarterbacks are not helpful. Where should Canada now stand?

There are other areas where there have been substantial policy shifts in the last few years that also need debate. The Middle East is one of the most obvious. While Canada can do relatively little on the overall prospects for peace, Canada has done important work with refugees and also (outside government) on the future of Jerusalem. Let there be public informed debate on this and other issues as Canadian citizens make up their mind who to vote for this Fall.

The Government has effectively abandoned the tradition of running for a seat on the UN Security Council. Is it because the Government can no longer be sure that we have sufficient influence in the world community to get elected?

For the debate to occur, there will need to be a demand for it. That demand should come from the public and be reflected in the media. Voters would then have a much better basis for deciding how they will cast their ballot. There is a great deal happening in the world. Our security and our prosperity are at stake. If we have a clear view of what world we want and devote the necessary resources to achieving it, we can affect our chances of success.

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