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**“PERFECT STORM RISING: QUÉBEC SEPARATION AND THE  
THREAT OF CIVIL CONFLICT IN CANADA”**

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## ABSTRACT

By virtue of its persistence, logical certainty and potentially catastrophic consequences, no other single issue poses as great a threat to the Canadian confederation as the prospect of Québec sovereignty. Although Ottawa has attempted to allay the separatist inclinations in Québec through various forms of asymmetric federalism, the fundamentally decisive *Québécois* grievances of alienation and marginalization remain extant. Meanwhile, Québec's growing economic strength and financial independence have significantly reduced the last major obstacle to a potential sovereignty referendum victory. Whereas the popular *Québécois* desire for sovereignty in past referenda faltered for want of economic security guarantees and 'sovereignty association' with the rest of Canada, the growth of Québec's financial independence in a globalized market space has obviated that need. Once another charismatic *chef* in the best traditions of the *projet souverainiste* emerges to harness the separatist forces of popular frustration and nascent confidence, the stage will be set for Québec's transition to eventual sovereignty and independence. Although the challenges of independence are predictable, the various issues involved in the complex divorce from Ottawa are likely to push a newly independent Québec to the verge of instability and collapse. Ultimately, under such conditions, it is illogical to expect that the economic necessity for the speedy reconciliation of outstanding issues can be achieved without the eruption of escalatory friction and violence. Especially within the already under-resourced security environment that Canadian, security and law enforcement agencies currently find themselves, the very real danger of even localized, low level violence spiralling out of control in such a situation is manifest. Ultimately, the implications for the long-term peaceable survival of the Canadian federal state are not encouraging.

## I. THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM: INTRODUCTION

*“The tragedy of Canada today is that just when we need a country that's pulling together in common cause, we have one that keeps finding new ways to pull itself apart.”*

*Angus Reid*<sup>1</sup>

### THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE

Like the weather, the question of Québec and its place in Confederation, is a constant preoccupation for Canadians. Harsh climatic extremes buffet the various regions of the country and affect each in a disparate fashion, often leaving devastation and despair in their wake. Although the weather is generally predictable to a high degree of certainty, given the strength and breadth of the powers of nature, its effects are rarely avoidable, leaving Canadians with no other option than to deal with the desolation caused by massive ice storms, heavy snowfalls and hurricane-force gales. So it is, metaphorically, with Québec and the question of separation. Canadians helplessly watch as the cataclysmic perfect storm, that all suspect and fear is coming, forms on the horizon and threatens to rip apart the confederal union that is Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Canada, as first a colony and, later, as a federal state, was established as an uneasy accommodation of the “Two Founding Nations” of French and English descendants who made their homes in Upper and Lower Canada. Throughout Canada’s often-turbulent social history, successive imperial governors and federal prime ministers

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<sup>1</sup> Angus Reid, [quote on-line]; available from [http://www.canadaka.net/quotes\\_list](http://www.canadaka.net/quotes_list); Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Alan C. Cairns, “Looking into the Abyss: The Need for a Plan C,” in *The Referendum Papers: Essays on Secession and National Unity*, ed. by David R. Cameron, 199-243 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 199.

have faced the challenge of assuaging various and disparate regional groups with a view to ensuring cohesion and perpetuating the integrity of the dominion. Indeed, if there is one constantly pre-eminent theme throughout the political, social and economic evolution of Canada, it is that of leaders attempting to maintain at least a semblance of inter-regional cohesion in the face of a myriad of internal and external pressures. Behind the facade of the constitutionally enshrined principles of ‘Peace, Order and Good Government,’ Canadian domestic and foreign policies have consistently taken a back seat to the practical exigencies of national unity.

Indeed, the threat of Québec’s separation from the rest of Canada is a clear and ever-present danger to the country’s federal political union.<sup>3</sup> Starting from a strong linguistic-based ethnic identity, the impulse of *Québécois* nationalism was sustained and accelerated by the rapid social change that accompanied the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> This impulse manifests itself today, most notably, in public opinion polls (which indicate the desire for sovereignty and independence retain a permanent grip on the hearts and minds of at least half of the Québec electorate<sup>5</sup>), the entrenchment of active political

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<sup>3</sup> Michelle Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security: The Role of the Canadian Forces in the Event of Québec Separation* (Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 2001), 79.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Balthazar, “Québec and the Ideal of Federalism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 538 (March, 1995): 44.

<sup>5</sup> The Québec electorate’s support for sovereignty and unqualified independence has rarely dipped below 40%. When the concept of economic partnership with Canada is associated with the question, a referendum-winning 58% of voters indicate support for the idea of sovereignty. Even with the PQ out of power in 2003, popular support for sovereignty has remained high and from October, 2003 to November, 2004 was sustained at levels between 47%-49%. See the extensive polling data available from the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, “Québec Sovereignty: An Outdated Idea” (6 November, 2001), [news release on-line]; available from [http://cric.ca/pdf/cric\\_poll/portraits/portraits2001\\_sovereignty.pdf](http://cric.ca/pdf/cric_poll/portraits/portraits2001_sovereignty.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007; Centre for Research and Information on Canada, “Québec – Sovereignty Support Up” (4 November, 2004) [news release on-line]; available from [http://www.queensu.ca/cora/polls/2004/November4-Québec\\_sovereignty\\_support\\_up.pdf](http://www.queensu.ca/cora/polls/2004/November4-Québec_sovereignty_support_up.pdf); Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007; Réjean Pelletier, “Partinariat, Référendum et Social-Démocratie: Les Conditions Nécessaire,” *Policy Options* 26, no. 1 (December, 2004 – January, 2005): 34; and Jean-Herman Guay, “Le

parties at both the national and provincial levels dedicated primarily to Québec's secession,<sup>6</sup> and Québec's isolation and exclusion from the Canadian constitution.

The 1995 Québec Referendum on sovereignty (in an even more dramatic re-enactment of the 1980 version of the same event), saw the nationalist *Québécois* vortex of socio-economic subjugation, fed and accelerated by the winds of constitutional alienation and political demagoguery on both sides of the question, spin together in a perfect storm and come within fractions of a percentage point of disintegrating the Canadian confederation.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the apparent culmination of the 'Non' forces in the 1995 referendum, many contemporary federalist commentators have been all too ready to wishfully declare the sovereignist movement in mortal decline. To the contrary, although it is evolving, there is no sign that the nationalist impulse is weakening.<sup>8</sup>

Logic dictates that the requisite political, economic, and social conditions necessary to win a future referendum on sovereignty will, again, at some propitious point

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Parti Québécois: Au-delà du Conflit des Ambitions," *Policy Options* 26, no. 1 (December, 2004 – January, 2005): 21.

<sup>6</sup> For data and contemporary commentary on the durability of the sovereignist idea despite the relative oscillating fortunes of the *Bloc Québécois* and the *Parti Québécois*, see Thomas J. Courchene, "The Changing Nature of Québec-Canada Relations: From the 1980 Referendum to the Summit of the Canada," *Institute for Research on Public Policy* 2004-8 (September, 2004): 1; Editorial, "Separatism isn't Dead," *National Post*, 1 February, 2007; André Pratte, "Mr. Ignatieff's Right: National Unity is Threatened," *Globe and Mail*, 12 September, 2006; and Gilles Gagné and Simon Langlois, "Is Separatism Dead? Not Quite Yet," *Policy Options* 21, no. 5 (June, 2000): 30.

<sup>7</sup> Cairns, "Looking into the Abyss..." 199.

<sup>8</sup> See commentary by Gilles Laporte, "D'un nationalisme à l'autre," *La Presse*, 1 April, 2007, [commentary on-line]; available from <http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070401/CPOPINIONS/704010565/5288/CPOPINIONS>; Internet accessed 1 April, 2007; and Rex Murpy, "Separatism by Another Name," *Globe and Mail*, 31 March, 2007, [article on-line]; available from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070330.wcorex0331/BNStory/specialComment>; Internet; accessed 1 April, 2007. The authors underline that the recent lacklustre performance by the separatist *Parti Québécois* in the March, 2007 Québec provincial elections signals an evolution in popular appeal of Québec sovereignty rather than the demise of the *indépendantiste* ideal.

in the future, converge to form the perfect separatist ‘storm.’ To be sure, the quality of contemporary political elites who are able to translate the frustration of the *Québécois* electorate into ‘Yes’ votes in a future referendum, on the same scale as did René Levesque and Lucien Bouchard, may be lacking.<sup>9</sup> However, as Québec’s relative socio-economic future within Canada promises to become ever more marginalized, North American free trade is concurrently providing Québec with the economic confidence that it hitherto lacked when brought to the precipice of independence. Once the current federalist experiments with asymmetric federalism and regional accommodation are discredited for want of fiscal resources and popular support from the rest of Canada, a separatist leader who is able to fan the flames of the disaffected *Québécois* nationalist impulse will emerge to push the sovereignist project to its logical *indépendantiste* conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

When this happens, and despite ill-founded and well-meaning assertions to the contrary from all sides of the issue, it is unrealistic to hope that any move towards Québec independence would be met with such universal acclaim as to not cause significant friction and conflict. The unpredictable nature of a Canada without Québec, in and of itself, belies the notion of a benignly smooth, sedate and deliberate transition to normalcy in the face of the inevitable division of federal economic and infrastructural responsibilities. When compounded by the emotional and historical claims to inalienable

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<sup>9</sup> Graham Fraser, “Whither the PQ?” *Policy Options* 26, no. 1 (December, 2004 – January, 2005): 27-28.

<sup>10</sup> Kalevi J. Holsti, “From Khartoum to Québec: Internationalism and Nationalism within the Multi-Community State,” in *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. by Kjell Goldman, Ulf Hannerz and Charles Westin, 143-169 (London: Routledge, 2000), 164.

minority and territorial rights on the parts of anti-sovereignist stakeholders resident in Québec, any national divorce scheme promises to be contentious and explosive.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE IMPULSE TO ETHNIC CONFLICT: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Assertions as to the unlikelihood of ethnic-based civil conflict in Canada following a unilateral declaration of independence on the part of Québec are often based on misreadings of Canadian history, overly narrow international comparisons and counterintuitive predictions as to the possible extremes of collective human nature under stressful situations.<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming weight of contemporary academic analyses reinforces the notion, however, that not only is conflict possible, it is highly likely given the probable circumstances in which an immediately post-independence Québec will find itself. Indeed, the four main “permissive conditions” for internal conflict; structurally weak state systems; divisive politics; over-burdened economies; and perceptions of cultural discrimination; are, as this paper will demonstrate, likely to be systemic in a newly independent state of Québec.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stéphane Dion, “The Dynamic of Secessions: Scenarios after a Pro-Separatist Vote in a Québec Referendum,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 3 (September, 1995): 543-5.

<sup>12</sup> In “The Experience of Other Federal and Confederal Countries,” in *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. by Alex Morrison, 153-164 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), Brian Job presents a superficial analysis which rejects the possibility of violence in the case of Québec separation despite acknowledging the existence of a set of acrimonious issues without obvious solutions. He readily dismisses the possibility of large scale clashes of formed security forces but neglects the overwhelming potential for socioeconomic destabilization to precipitate widespread low-level violence.

<sup>13</sup> See Michael E. Brown, “The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict Revised Edition*, ed. by Michael E. Brown, O.R. Coté Jr., S.M. Lynn-Jones, and S.E. Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), 4-5 and Pauline Baker and John Ausink, “State Collapse and Ethnic Violence: Toward a Predictive Model,” *Parameters* (Spring, 1996): 25. Baker and Ausink add the critically inter-related element of state collapse to the model citing additional factors such as demographic pressures, refugee movements, human flight, deterioration of public services and suspension of the rule of law; all of which would, conceivably, have particular relevance to a newly independent Québec.

These circumstances, underlining the prospect of the collapse or failure of a newly independent state of Québec, create successful conditions for the particularly explosive fundamental elements of ‘ethnic’ conflict, namely, hostile masses, belligerent leaders and inter-ethnic security dilemmas that mutually reinforce each other in a spiral of increasing conflict.<sup>14</sup> The existence of ancient hatreds, mutually antagonistic identities or impulses for national retribution is not required, either, to set the stage for nationalist conflict. Other matters such as leadership, politics and political agendas that exploit collective fears of the future are, most commonly, significant factors. Nationalism can be manufactured and enflamed for political purposes. “Political leadership, fear, and ‘tipping events’ [create] situations where a ‘kill or be killed’ psychology [takes] over.”<sup>15</sup>

Indeed,

The mechanism of violence ... [in contemporary civil and ethnic conflict] ... is remarkably banal. Rather than reflecting deep, historic passions and hatred, the violence seems to have been the result of a situation in which on, opportunistic, sadistic, and often distinctly non-ideological marauders were recruited and permitted free rein by political authorities. Because such people are found in all societies, [those] events ... could happen almost anywhere under the appropriate conditions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, “Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova’s Civil War,” *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 109.

<sup>15</sup> See Holsti, “From Khartoum to Québec...,” 154-5; David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, “Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict,” *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Autumn, 1996): 41; and John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (Summer, 2000): 43.

<sup>16</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” 43.

By way of pointed example, ““What happened in Yugoslavia and Rwanda could happen anywhere ... Canada often seems to be a nation of eminently reasonable people, but that is not the conclusion one would draw from watching a hockey game.”<sup>17</sup>

Preconditions for mass hostility include the existence of a set of ethnically defined grievances, negative ethnic stereotypes, disputes over emotional symbols and the threat of extinction founded in demographic trends and a history of domination of one group over another.<sup>18</sup> Following a referendum “Yes” vote and a declaration of independence by Québec, collective fear of an uncertain future translated into hostility could be expected to arise from discontent First Nations, Anglophone, allophone, and federalist francophone communities.<sup>19</sup> Movements to internally ‘partition’ Québec as a result of perceived threats to existing minority communities combined with external challenges as to the legality of secession would threaten and anger *Québécois* nationalists. It is not unreasonable to expect that the emotional conditions created by a ‘Yes’ vote in a vital referendum would override the rationality of people who other wise would remain innocent bystanders.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, observations of contemporary civil conflicts in relatively advanced societies demonstrate the tendency for even benign and otherwise ordinary citizens to fall victim to emotive political elites in reacting to perceived collective threats.

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<sup>17</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” 67.

<sup>18</sup> See Kaufman, “Spiraling to Ethnic War...,” 109. The history of *Québécois* grievances that found expression in the ‘Quiet Revolution,’ a profound sense of French-Canadian subjugation, faltering francophone birthrates in Québec and the erosion of the notion of two founding nations within Canada certainly meet these criteria.

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Astroff, “Make Up, Shake Up or Break Up? Assessing the Prospects for the Political Violence in the Case of Québec Secession,” *The McNaughton Papers* 13 (September, 2000): 12.

<sup>20</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 93-4.

“Extreme emotional forces could be unleashed after a "yes" vote, and their peaceful containment should not be assumed ... [It] is inevitable that large-scale police or military intervention would have to take place except in all but minor disturbances. Leaders of government and of the security forces would have no choice but to intervene in an effort to prevent more widespread violence [that] ... is likely to produce escalation.”<sup>21</sup>

If the “bi-communal” zero sum structure of the Canada – *Québécois* contention, exacerbates the pre-disposition for tension and makes negotiated accommodation less likely, pacific resolution of ethnic conflicts is all the more difficult in the Québec nationalist context.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, history over the last half century bears out the fact that ethnic wars can only end one of three ways; complete victory of one side over the other; self-governance of the affected community; or temporary suppression of the conflict by third party military occupation.<sup>23</sup> As ethnic conflict erupts in Québec, data since the end of the Second World War suggests that separation of conflicting groups would be key is the key to ending the conflict. If conflict starts, the country will not be easily put back together again, especially if resulting property damage and death rates are high.<sup>24</sup>

## OUTLINE

This paper argues that the prospect of Québec separation is highly probable by virtue of its inexorable logic. Moreover, when it does happen, the process of separation

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<sup>21</sup> David E. Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure, Conflict Processes and the Potential for Violence and Accommodation in Canada,” *Journal for Conflict Studies* 47, no. 2 (Fall, 1997): 5-6, [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/Fall97?articles/SCHMITT.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring, 1996): 139.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

will be accompanied by significant conflict. First, by underlining the binding linguistic and territorial qualities of French-Canadian ethnic nationalism I will demonstrate why, far from showing signs of abatement, Québec separatism will continue to be accentuated within the Canadian context. Against a backdrop that reflects a significant propensity for ethnic-based conflict throughout Canada's colourful and diverse history, I will then trace the growth and maturation of the *Québécois* sovereigntist impulse from its ethnic-nationalist foundations to its stronger and more relevant contemporary civic nationalist manifestations that grew out of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960's.

Secondly, and building on this emergent sense of modern nationalism, I will show how, as the necessary political conditions evolve to become aligned with a favourable economic situation, Québec will inevitably be driven to accede to some form of independent status from the rest of Canada. In effect, the growing sense of relative *Québécois* socio-political marginalization, when combined with the economic independence generated by a globalized marketplace, amplifies long-established grievances while, at the same time, removing traditional public opinion hurdles to the notion of independence. As demonstrated during Québec's previous referenda-related sovereignty campaigns, when this mix of political and economic factors is combined with the polarizing appeal of charismatic separatist political elites, the perfect conditions are thus set for a transition to independence.

Thirdly, through an analysis of the most likely situation in the aftermath of an emergent independent state of Québec, I will demonstrate why it is probable that the institutional controls necessary to temper fundamentally contentious interests will fail to restrain friction and conflict. The urgent necessity for both an independent Québec and

rest of Canada to rapidly resolve a multitude of complex issues related to their divorce will unavoidably and abruptly collide with the systemic intransigence of inflexible governmental systems. Weighty questions related to fundamental territorial and minority populations, the division of debt and infrastructure, international pressures and the probability of external intervention will push an independent Québec to the brink of collapse. Within this context of a near failing state, the dynamics of agitated populations will plant the seeds for outbursts of ethnic-based violence not easily controlled by already over-burdened security forces.

Although based on the fundamental notion of French-Canadian ethnic nationalism,<sup>25</sup> throughout this paper, I refer to *Québécois* in the civic nationalist sense as

...the collective identity of a group of people born or living in a specified territory with a shared history, a shared voluntary allegiance to a sovereign government whose powers are defined and delimited by laws enacted and enforced through institutions such as Parliament or Congress, and a common loyalty to powerful symbols and myths of nationality.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The critical aspect of ethnic nationalism is not necessarily a common biological or genetic descent but, rather, a belief in a common descent. See James McPherson, "Québec Whistles Dixie," *Saturday Night* (March, 1998): 14.

<sup>26</sup> McPherson, "Québec Whistles Dixie," 14-15. Also see Daniel Latouche, "Globalization in a Very Small Place: From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism in Québec," Chap. 9 in *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, ed. Michael Keating and John McGarry, 179-202 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 193, which describes civic nationalism as "... that form of collective identity and action that stresses those elements of individuality based principally although not exclusively on a territorially bounded public sphere rather than on the exclusive combination of certain ethno-cultural markers and historical experiences." In "Nationalism, Nation-States, and Violence at the End of the Twentieth Century: A Sociological View." Chap. 1 in *Nationalism and Violence*, ed. Christopher Dandeker, 21-47 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 26, Christopher Dandeker, emphasizes that the distinction between an ethnic group and a 'nation' is that of territory. A nation is an ethnic group that identifies with a specific territorial space. Nations possess territory rather than merely retain an association with it. All three definitions conform to the notion of *Québécois* nationalism.

In addition, while recognizing that words such as separatism, sovereignty and independence have politically charged meanings for stakeholders on each side of the Canadian national unity debate, I have not consciously split semantic definitions of these terms. I use each almost interchangeably in accordance with their general usage in contemporary literature. Throughout, I associate *Québécois* nationalism with the impulse to realize the creation of an increasingly autonomous, if not fully independent, state based on the territorial and political framework that is embodied by the present Province of Québec.

## II. STORM CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON

*“Il faut que nous osions saisir pour nous l’entière liberté du Québec, son droit à tout le contenu essentiel de l’indépendance, c’est-à-dire à la pleine maîtrise de toutes et chacune de ses principales décisions collectives. Cela signifie que le Québec doit devenir au plus tôt un État souverain.”*

*“Si je vous ai bien compris, vous êtes en train de dire: à la prochaine fois.”*

René Levesque<sup>27</sup>

### FRENCH-CANADIAN ETHNIC NATIONALISM

What is key to understanding the separatist impulse in Québec, is that it is not a temporary or fleeting theme in Canadian history that has shown signs of weakening or subsiding of its own accord. French-speaking *Québécois* stress, individually and collectively, that they are unlike other ethnic groups in Canada and regard themselves as *un peuple distinct* with their own bonding territorial identification and historic institutions. Accordingly, the “Francophone ethnic identity has developed into full-fledged nationalism based upon the preservation of francophone culture within the Québec homeland.”<sup>28</sup> The French-Canadian nationalist urge, born of an ethnic identity rooted firmly in a separate language, religion and ideology, with immutable roots in the North American territory of *La Nouvelle France*, gained particular momentum in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Its enduring qualities underline the power and persistence of

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<sup>27</sup> René Levesque, *1980 sovereignty referendum concession speech*, Montréal, Québec (20 May, 1980) [speech on-line]; available from [http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDC-0-17-715-4212-10/politique\\_economie/referendum\\_souverainete\\_1980/](http://archives.radio-canada.ca/IDC-0-17-715-4212-10/politique_economie/referendum_souverainete_1980/); Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 4.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Smiley, “The Canadian Federation and the Challenge of the Québec Independence,” *Publius* 8, no. 1 (Winter, 1978): 201.

the ethnic-based origins of the Québec sovereignist movement, based as they are in a unifying and distinct identity<sup>30</sup> reinforced by nation-defining conformity to the specific territory of French North America that is Québec.<sup>31</sup> Effectively, the movement underscores the power and passion of the French-Canadian ethnic nationalist spirit and demonstrates notion that,

“...even in the most civic of states [like Canada], where political and legal equality are the rule rather than the exception, where there is a high degree of interaction, mutual sympathy, and even common identity, and where there is equal access to government and government largesse some will want to separate.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus are planted the seeds of ethno-political conflict reflective of Québec’s struggle within Canada where nationalist fervour, perceived inalienable rights and struggles over access to the organs of state power<sup>33</sup> “...provide intense fuel for emerging conflicts, ... where ... compromise can be difficult if not impossible ... [and] ... nationalistic passions can be inflamed beyond the point of self-restraint among many partisans.”<sup>34</sup> When national identity is tied to territory and autonomy, as it is in Québec,

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<sup>30</sup> See Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions..,” 141; Ernest Gellner, “Nations and Nationalism,” (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Daniel Latouche, “Globalization...,” 188. While Kaufmann and Gellner both underline the importance of homogenous cultural factors (i.e., ideology, religion and race), in facilitating the establishment of cultural identities, Gellner stresses the importance of acquiring economic education and skills and political power as avenues by which nationalism is exercised and expressed. Latouche, in turn, posits that the unique challenges of globalization (i.e., embedding, incorporation, enclosure and consciousness) provide the same effect, thus explaining the “persistence and reorientation of Québec nationalism.”

<sup>31</sup> Dandeker, “Nationalism...,” 26.

<sup>32</sup> Holsti, “From Khartoum to Québec...,” 165.

<sup>33</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, “Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System,” *International Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (September, 1994): 354.

<sup>34</sup> Schmitt, David E. “Ethnic Structure...,” 4-6.

national movements are fundamentally associated with enhanced risks of conflict and violence.<sup>35</sup> The propensity of conflict effectively rises in societies where there is a large degree of ethnic intermingling, as in Québec, and separatists align their aspirations with direct control over specific tracts of land. Within the context of ethno-national mobilization (like the *Québécois* sovereignist movement), the friction caused by the close interaction of distinct ethnic groups hardens and reinforces opposing collective identities. The more radical elements within each group tend to impose sanctions on those who do not contribute to their own cause while opposing groups, themselves, assign adversarial labels to those outside their own collective.<sup>36</sup> Under such conditions, contemporary historical analysis and surveys demonstrate that, even in democratic societies, albeit less developed than Canada, direct attacks on civilians, intense guerrilla warfare, ethnic cleansing and genocide can result.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, because of the multiple vulnerabilities and offensive opportunities offered by ethnic intermingling of populations, as in some areas of Québec, they cause intense security dilemmas.<sup>38</sup>

## THE QUIET REVOLUTION

Although the French-Canadian identity traces its roots back to the experiences of the earliest *voyageurs* and *habitants* who literally carved a unique existence out of the harsh hinterland of the St. Lawrence River valley, it was the rapid economic growth and resulting socioeconomic pressure for social change following World War Two that

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<sup>35</sup> Dandeker, “Nationalism...,” 26.

<sup>36</sup> Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions...,” 143.

<sup>37</sup> Brown, “The Causes of Internal Conflict...,” 7.

<sup>38</sup> Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions...,” 139.

precipitated the Québec nationalist impulse of today. Historically, the French-Canadian identity had been stoked by a long record of perceived mistreatment based on a strong sense of systemic exploitation, resentment at English Canada's "internal colonialism"<sup>39</sup> and a grave concern that the fundamental Canadian notion of duality between the founding French and English races was failing and being displaced.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, this dynamic also fuelled broader symbolic concerns over collective identity, distinctiveness and recognition while planting the seeds of enduring cultural cleavage between francophone Québec and the rest of English Canada on issues of foreign, defence and social policies.<sup>41</sup>

Following World War Two, high economic expectations exacerbated growing social frustration on the part of the growing class of well-educated, professionally confident and socially aware Québec francophone baby boomers. This phenomenon resulted in improvements in standards of living being positively correlated with rising resentment towards Ottawa and growing confidence in secession to the point of it being a "driving force" in the nationalist impulse.<sup>42</sup> Québec Premier Jean Lesage's socially progressive initiatives in the early 1960's to modernize Québec society through governmental, educational and social welfare reforms had been in response to, but not enough to satisfy, *la Révolution Tranquille*. Wider popular political, economic and social

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<sup>39</sup> Hudson Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism in Québec," *World Politics* 45, no. 2 (January, 1993): 206.

<sup>40</sup> Gagné and Langlois, "Is Separatism Dead?..." 31.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-Sébastien Rioux, *Two Solitudes: Québécois' Attitudes Regarding Canadian Security and Defence Policy*. (Calgary: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2005), 17-20.

<sup>42</sup> Stéphane Dion, "Why is Secession Difficult in Well-Established Democracies? Lessons from Québec." *British Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 2 (April, 1996): 278.

expectations could not be satisfied by the legacy contemporary political order.<sup>43</sup> This socioeconomic modernization fostered an acrimonious atmosphere of competition with Ottawa as the government of Québec created its own welfare, cultural and economic programs and struggled to regain what it had either previously lost or never acquired from the Dominion.<sup>44</sup>

This growing political and social disaffection manifested itself most prominently through the politicization of the separatist movement embodied by the birth of the separatist *Parti Québécois* (PQ) in 1968. With its election to the *Assemblée nationale* in 1970,<sup>45</sup> followed by its watershed ascension to the premiership of Québec in 1976, Canada commenced its still unfinished and profoundly destabilizing journey down the road of provincial challenges to the federal union.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, the question of national unity has controlled the Canadian national political agenda for a generation and the Québec separatist impulse stands out as being one of the most powerful nationalist movements in the West today.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, "...Québec separatism was the most fundamental issue of political conflict in Canada..." in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Astroff, "Make Up...", 4.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Balthazar, "Québec and the Ideal of Federalism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 538 (March, 1995): 43.

<sup>45</sup> Marcel Côté, "Que Veut Maintenant le Québec?" *Policy Options* 24, no. 9 (October, 2003): 56.

<sup>46</sup> Smiley, "The Canadian Federation...", 224.

<sup>47</sup> Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism...", 203.

<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Ian Ross and Ted Robert Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States," *Comparative Politics* 21, no. 4 (July, 1989): 421.

The fear of linguistic isolation, in particular, and "...English assimilation (fed) the feeling of collective francophone solidarity in Québec ..."<sup>49</sup> and has provoked state-sponsored retrenchment in the form of provincial legislative efforts to reinforce the French linguistic regime in the province.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, the state apparatus of the Québec provincial government has come to be seen as the legitimate guarantor of *la nation Québécoise*. Concurrently, the Quiet Revolution precipitated a strengthening and renaissance in the notion of French-Canadian nationalism towards a model that reflected the emergence of a socially progressive *état moderne Québécois*. Though deeply rooted in the historical homogeneity of *le Canada français*, the ethnic concept of nationalism began to encompass the notion of 'civic nationalism' and identification with a pluralistic concept of a Québec nation.<sup>51</sup> In effect, the civic-nationalist notion that sprung from the Quiet Revolution of being, foremost, *Québécois*<sup>52</sup> served to amplify and legitimize the emotional fervour and attachment of *les Canadiens-français* in defence of their common language, institutions and distinct identity.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dion, "Why is Secession Difficult..." 277.

<sup>50</sup> See Smiley, "The Canadian Federation..." 216; and Schmitt, "Ethnic Structure, 5.

<sup>51</sup> P. Coulombe, "Québec in the Federation," in *Challenges to Canadian Federalism*, ed. Martin Westmacott and Hugh Mellom, 187-197 (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1993), 189.

<sup>52</sup> By at least the early 1990's, contemporary polls showed that Québec francophones identified themselves as *Québécois* by a margin of 62% before any other label. See Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism..." 218.

<sup>53</sup> See McPherson, "Québec Whistles Dixie," 14-5; and Balthazar, "Québec and the Ideal..." 44. McPherson defines civic nationalism as the "...the collective identity of a group of people born or living in a specified territory with a shared history, a shared voluntary allegiance to a sovereign government whose powers are defined and delimited by laws enacted and enforced through institutions such as Parliament or Congress, and a common loyalty to powerful symbols and myths of nationality." Both authors stress the enduring and adaptive qualities of the civic nationalist model and its fundamental relevance to the Québec separatist movement.

## THE HISTORICAL PRE-DISPOSITION TO CONFLICT

Despite a general presumption of pacifism, Canadian history is replete with recurrent examples of collective violence which strongly indicate significant systemic problems with “political and social integration.” From the “Shiners’ War” of the 1830s to the “Oka Crisis” of the 1990s, profound social polarizations along ethnic, linguistic, political and religious lines have often found expression in large scale inter-group violence or collective armed protest against duly established legislatures in Canada.<sup>54</sup> In particular, the path to recognition and social equality for francophones both inside and outside of Québec, has often been overshadowed by violent confrontations amongst stakeholders from the earliest colonial times. The most notable examples include the

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<sup>54</sup> See Thomas Mitchell, “Review Essay: Violence and Politics in Canada,” *American Journal of Canadian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1981): 87-93, for an extensive summary of the Canadian history of relatively large scale collective violence based on primarily ethnic inter-group divisions. Notably, Mitchell records the following incidents:

- The “Shiners’ War” (widespread ethnic conflict between Irish immigrants and French loggers in the Ottawa Valley during the 1830’s);
- The Cornwall riots (months-long ethnic Irish upheavals in Cornwall, Ontario during the 1830s);
- The York Riots (large scale riots between rival political groups in York, Ontario, 1832);
- The Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837-1838;
- The Lachine Strike (strike and manifestations by Irish immigrants working on the Lachine Canal project required calling out troops to put down uprising, Lachine, Québec, 1845);
- Civil disturbances in Montreal, Québec and Bytown, Ontario as a result of the Rebellion Losses Act (in effect a continuation of the “Shiners’ War”, 1849);
- Catholic versus Protestant clashes in Newfoundland (February to November, 1861);
- The Riel Rebellions (Red River , Manitoba, 1869-1870 and North West Rebellion, 1885);
- The ‘Cartier’ political riots (Montreal, Québec, 1872);
- The Caraquet Riots (Catholic versus Protestant violence over the ‘Education Bill, 1871’, Caraquet, New Brunswick, 1875);
- The Québec Conscription Riots (anti-conscription riots in Québec in 1918 preceded by a series of bombings and smaller riots throughout 1917);
- The Winnipeg General Strike (Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1919);
- The Holmes Foundry Strike (organized mob violence, Sarnia, Ontario, 1937);
- The Asbestos Strike (traditionally seen as the spark of the Quiet Revolution, Québec, 1949);
- Doukhobor violence (Christian anarchism based on rejection of central authority involving bombing, terrorism, organized violence, Western Canada early 1900s); and
- The FLQ Crisis (declaration of martial law in response to terrorist acts, primarily in Montreal, Québec, October, 1970).

Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada (1837-1838), the Métis revolts stirred by the firebrand francophone revolutionary Louis Riel in the Northwest Territories (1870 and 1885), the Québec Conscription crisis (1917-1918) and the October Crisis of 1970.<sup>55</sup> In the socioeconomic realm of labour relations, the 90 years from 1877 to 1966 saw Canada experience over 227 strike actions that exploded in violence, of which 66 (or nearly a third) were in Québec.<sup>56</sup> Of all these incidents, at least 150 (46 in Québec, alone) constituted such violence that deployments of heavily armed police or armed military forces were required to restore order.<sup>57</sup>

It would be reassuring to take solace in the notion that the incidents of violence noted above were the product of a bygone era of mob radicalism in the face of the less than enlightened intransigence of inflexible governments. But, relatively recent Canadian history, including the October, 1970 Crisis that developed in response to the actions of the terrorist *Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ)* and the 1990 Oka Crisis demonstrate that Canada, in general, and Québec, in particular, are not immune to armed insurgent civil disturbances that result in national emergencies.<sup>58</sup> Fuelled by a strong nationalist *Québécois* agenda and frustrated by the glacial pace of political reform, the highly sophisticated FLQ began its campaign of terror attacks in Québec beginning in 1963. Its goal was to awaken French-Canadians to their colonized subjugation within the Canadian federation, demonstrate the state's weakness in the face of a determined separatist

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<sup>55</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Marc Laurendau, *Les Québécois Violents* (Québec: Éditions du Boréal, 1990), 56.

<sup>57</sup> Jacques Castonguay, *Questions Relatives à la Défense et à la Sécurité du Québec à la Souveraineté*, Paper presented at a conference of the Institut Militaire du Québec (20 January, 1992): 5.

<sup>58</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 3.

movement and provoke over-reaction on the part of authorities in order to undermine the government's legitimacy.<sup>59</sup> Over the course of the 1960s, up until the Québec government's urging of the declaration of the War Measures Act and the resultant deployment of thousands of Canadian Forces troops to assist in the restoration of order in October, 1970, *FLQ* cells

“...raided militia armouries and stole automatic and anti-tank weapons; bombed provincial and federal targets; engaged in sophisticated labour and student group agitation which produced increasing waves of violence; and even planned the assassination of a future Prime Minister.”<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, at the height of the Quiet Revolution, between 1968 and 1971, Canada averaged more than 40 terror-related events per year.<sup>61</sup> The pinnacle of *FLQ* terrorism, which also included multiple murders and bank robberies, was the successive kidnappings of a British diplomat and a Québec government minister in early October, 1970.<sup>62</sup>

In 1990, aboriginal land claims disputes found violent expression in Oka, Québec when Mohawk warriors rioted, blocked commercial land developments and erected barricades on major thoroughfares. The shooting death of a Québec provincial police officer resulted in a long, tense and drawn-out standoff that eventually culminated in the deployment, again, of thousands of Canadian Forces (CF) troops upon the request of the Québec government under provisions of the National Defence Act.<sup>63</sup> The actions by the

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<sup>59</sup> Astroff, “Make Up...,”4.

<sup>60</sup> Sean M. Maloney, “Domestic Operations: The Canadian Approach,” *Parameters* 27, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 138.

<sup>61</sup> Ross and Gurr, “Why Terrorism Subsides...,” 421.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>63</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,”6.

First Nations militants at Oka and surrounding aboriginal reserves quickly led to indiscriminate violence by local civilians against each other across the ethnic divide and galvanized native political protest across the country.<sup>64</sup>

These incidents underscore a fatalistic Canadian predisposition towards the potential for even local ethno-political instability and violence to spiral out of control in the face of ill-prepared and ill-equipped governments.<sup>65</sup> Canadian legislatures, imbued with the constitutionally enshrined duty to preserve law and order, have historically been extremely eager to meet violent insurgent events with repressive reactions designed, above all, to curb future transgressions.<sup>66</sup> Notably, the single most consistent invocation of martial law in Canada, whether under the restrictive 1914 War Measures Act or others, has been in the province of Québec.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, relatively small groups in pursuit of narrow political agendas based on strongly held ethno-nationalist beliefs, whether they be anti-conscription rioters, radical First Nations activists or *FLQ* terrorists, have demonstrated the potential and, indeed, probability (in the face of weak or disorganized governments) of provoking enormously destabilizing consequences and setting the conditions for “significant official or communal violence.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 8-9. “The rebellion by Mohawks at Oka in 1990 constituted a major challenge to the government of Québec as well as the federal government. It marked the first use of the Canadian military in a domestic rebellion since the troubles surrounding the FLQ crisis in 1970. *So furious were some civilians at the Natives that rocks were thrown at Native children and the elderly, with suggestions of vigilante action against the Mohawks.*”

<sup>65</sup> Astroff, “Make Up...,” 2.

<sup>66</sup> Judy Torrance, “The Response of Canadian Governments to Violence,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 3 (September, 1977): 489.

<sup>67</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 6.

### III. PERFECT STORM RISING: CONDITIONS FOR A “YES” VOTE

*“We will not hesitate, then, at the great crossroads of the Referendum, to choose the only road that can open up the horizon and guarantee us a free, proud and adult national existence, the road that will be opened to us - Québécois of today and tomorrow - by one positive and resounding answer : Yes.”*<sup>69</sup>

#### REFERENDA AS A LEGITIMATE EXPRESSION OF SEPARATION

The Quiet Revolution and the attendant signs of political disaffection in Québec moved Ottawa to offer *les Québécois* a bilingual and bicultural federal alternative to the nationalist appeal of sovereignty and independence.<sup>70</sup> Federal efforts at appeasement have done little to dampen the nationalist allure, however, and the relative electoral success of the *PQ* in becoming the official opposition party to the governing Liberals in Québec’s *Assemblée nationale* in 1970, reflected the growing popular appeal of attaining Québec independence if only through peaceful and, preferably, democratic means.<sup>71</sup> By convention, practice and law, Canada has embraced the democratic exercise of popular opinion through referenda as the legitimate means of expressing the sovereigntist project. The October 1992 Canadian national referendum on the constitutional amendment package embodied in the Charlottetown Accord, as well as the 1980 and 1995 Québec referendums on sovereignty, have reflected that fact.

Although separatist *PQ* hardliners argue that a future referendum on sovereignty would be superfluous if a clear political mandate designed to achieve the same thing

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<sup>69</sup> Government of Québec, “Québec – Canada: A New Deal,” Québec: Official Publisher, 1979 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.uni.ca/library/newdeal1979.html>; Internet; accessed 11 March, 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Smiley, “The Canadian Federation...,” 201.

<sup>71</sup> Ross and Gurr, “Why Terrorism Subsidies...,” 413.

could be attained by other means (e.g, a strong electoral return by a sovereigntist party in provincial elections), it is recognized that referenda provide a strong legitimizing justification for the separatist agenda.<sup>72</sup> To be sure, the separatist commitment to the referendum process is reflected in the *PQ*'s overt repudiation of the violent means of social revolution espoused by the *FLQ* and the conduct of multiple sovereignty referenda (i.e., 1980 and 1995) despite holding majority governments in twenty of the *Assemblée nationale*'s last thirty years.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the persistence of the Québec separatist movement belies weak Canadian federalist assertions that secessionist movements can rarely succeed in well-established democracies.<sup>74</sup>

Despite wavering Québec public support for another referendum at the current time, the extant declarations of the *PQ* make the threat of separation by referendum ever present.<sup>75</sup> Far from appeasing or eradicating the innate nationalist *Québécois* desire for independence, the close run defeat of the 1995 referendum question on sovereignty reinforced the notion of how far Québec is from giving consent to remain in Canada. With national disintegration coming, as it did, within fractions of a percentage point of becoming reality, the referendum was a stark reminder to the rest of Canada, that Québec's secession was an alarmingly tangible possibility. Post referendum analyses of

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<sup>72</sup> Pelletier, "Partinariat...", 34.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> See Dion, "Why is Secession Difficult..." Without credibly acknowledging the enduring and evolving qualities of the *Québécois* sovereigntist impulse, Mr. Dion relies on a very narrow sample of dissimilar democratic disintegrations at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to emphasize the unlikelihood of the same thing happening in Canada. Conversely, Mr. Dion's subsequently vital hand, as a federal minister, in drafting the Canadian government's 'Clarity Act', would seem to signal a change of opinion in that the act underscores the possibility, if not the probability, of an eventual separatist referendum victory in Canada.

<sup>75</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 79.

the 1995 referendum serve to reveal three main factors underlying the winning conditions for such a vote; most importantly, the sense of identification with Québec and Canada; secondly, expectations regarding the standard of living to be had in a sovereign Québec; and thirdly, relative assessments of the value of the federal system.<sup>76</sup>

## THE DEMOGRAPHIC BACKDROP

Statistical data analysis following the 1995 referendum showed that, far from comprising a uniform voting block, the *Québécois* electorate is diverse and evolving in its approach to the sovereignty question. In order for the separatist ideal to carry a referendum vote comprised of a bare majority of “50% + 1”, Québec demographics (where approximately 14% of the electorate consistently vote against sovereignty) require that 60% of francophone voters rally to the cause.<sup>77</sup> Specifically, younger, upwardly mobile and professionally successful francophones tend to favour the sovereignty option, while those at the opposite end of the spectrum (i.e., older, lower income homemakers and state-dependent pensioners) have traditionally been strongly in favour of the status quo attachment to Canada.<sup>78</sup> Seventy-five percent of people over 65 years of age, and 66% of people over 55 voted “No” in the 1995 referendum.<sup>79</sup>

Nonetheless, *Québécois* public opinion, beginning with the Quiet Revolution, has shown signs of an evolution that reflected a growing nationalist affinity for sovereignty that spanned the age group divide. This demographic transformation tends to undermine

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<sup>76</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Dion, “Why is Secession Difficult...,” 277.

<sup>78</sup> Gagné and Langlois, “Is Separatism Dead?....,” 33.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

the hypothesis that an ageing Québec population will tend to more readily support a continued attachment to Canada. As the young *Québécois* firebrands who grew up during the *Révolution Tranquille* have aged, they are proving to be much more hesitant to relinquish their attachment to the nationalist dream of sovereignty.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, polls tend to indicate that the sentiment is persistent and that it transcends allegiance to any particular political party. The declining electoral fortunes of the *PQ* since the 1995 referendum, for example, have more to do with temporary political difficulties within the party as opposed to a permanent shift in voter backing for sovereignty amongst key support groups.<sup>81</sup>

#### **THE FINAL REFERENDUM HURDLE: ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND THE VITAL APPEAL OF SOVEREIGNTY ASSOCIATION**

The question of an independent Québec's economic viability and the costs of political transition are a restraint on the mobilization of support for sovereignty. Surveys consistently reflect the notion that even for hard-line separatist *Québécois*, sovereignty which guarantees some form of economic association or partnership has traditionally been popular while outright independence has not.<sup>82</sup> The notion of 'sovereignty' fulfils the deeply embedded notion of independence, while the association part of the equation satisfies the strong *Québécois* economic identification with 'Canada'.<sup>83</sup> The allure of sovereignty would be all the much stronger if the Québec electorate could be guaranteed that there really would be nothing to fear economically in an independent state and that

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<sup>80</sup> Claire Durand, "The Evolution of Support for Sovereignty - Myths and Realities," *Institute for Intergovernmental Affairs Working Paper* no. 8 (2001): 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

standards of living would be sustained, industries would survive and jobs would not be lost. Ultimately, sovereignty can not hold popular sway without an economic foundation.<sup>84</sup>

Between 1980 and 1995, as a result of the Quiet Revolution's social awakening and years of unfruitful constitutional debate over Québec's accommodation in confederation, popular support in Québec for outright separation from Canada doubled to 40%. When the additional qualifier of free market 'association' with the rest of Canada was applied to the question of independence, support for separation amongst *Québécois* voters was maintained at anywhere between 50% to 65%.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, bucking the conventional wisdom which predicted a dramatic decrease for separation amongst Québec voters following the 1995 referendum, 2001 polling on the question of Québec independence has shown that the attraction to the sovereigntist ideal has not subsided. Although a great majority of *Québécois* were not eager to see a referendum any time soon, sovereignty support has barely slipped below 40% even on the question of clear-cut independence. When the concept of economic association is assumed to be guaranteed, a referendum-winning 58% of voters are ready to support sovereignty.<sup>86</sup>

In their quest for an independent Québec, separatist leaders have been quick to mollify Québec popular opinion regarding economic risks. During the campaign leading up to the October, 1995 sovereignty referendum, *PQ* leader and chief proponent of the

<sup>82</sup> Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism..." 228.

<sup>83</sup> Simeon, Richard, "Limits to Partnership: Canada-Québec Relations in a Postsecession Era," *The Secession Papers: C.D. Howe Institute Commentary* 104 (March, 1998): 10.

<sup>84</sup> Pelletier, "Partinariat..." 33.

<sup>85</sup> Jacques Parizeau, "The Case for a Sovereign Québec," *Foreign Policy* 99 (Summer, 1995): 70.

<sup>86</sup> Centre for Research and Information on Canada. "Québec Sovereignty..."

sovereignty option, Jacques Parizeau, explicitly declared that Québec would assume its *fair* share of the national Canadian debt while maintaining monetary union with Ottawa in the event of a “*Oui*” vote. As he would have had the electorate believe, there was nothing that Canada could do to stop it anyway.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, federal separatist party *Bloc Québécois* leader Lucien Bouchard ardently promoted the notion that there would be no economic cost to separation or, at the very most, the economic impact of such a move would be minimal. Nonetheless, following the referendum and, as a result of the closeness of the vote, Québec’s economy did tumble on fears of economic stability especially in relation to Ontario and the rest of Canada.<sup>88</sup>

## **THE RISE OF QUÉBEC, INCORPORATED: NAFTA AND GLOBALIZATION**

Consequently, in the wake of the economically linked failure of the 1995 Referendum, Québec was

...encouraged to reduce its reliance on the Canadian market for commercial growth, its reliance on Canadian diplomacy, political leadership and economic media for help in attracting investment, budgetary help and remedial measures. The environment instead reinforced Québec’s inclination to look to its own resources for strength and direction, and to look outside Canada for growth, opportunity and allies.<sup>89</sup>

Still frustrated by a lack of real progress on the constitutional front, Québec’s political and economic leaders made a conscious decision to form Québec into its own economic region-state (as opposed to subordinate part of a larger federal union) regardless of

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<sup>87</sup> Parizeau, “The Case...,” 74.

<sup>88</sup> Courchene, “The Changing Nature...,” 12.

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Francois Lisé, “Is Québec a North American Region-State?” *Policy Options* 22, no. 10 (December, 2001): 30.

whether it became independent or not. While being spurned by the rest of the Canadian business and political elite, Québec, in effect, became its own “region-state”, assisted in large part by focussed marketing in the US and abroad. Separatist provincial leaders were, like then Premier Lucien Bouchard, bound to prove that that Québec could emerge as a viable independent unit and thus, conceivably, set the winning conditions for another referendum.<sup>90</sup>

The 1988 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in particular, assisted Québec’s emergence as an autonomous economic entity over the course of the 1990s. The emergence of the free trade zone in North America obviated the explicit requirement for a customs union or the maintenance of trade ties with the rest of Canada as a pre-requisite for sovereignty.<sup>91</sup> By keeping abreast of the high-tech requirements of a modern information-based economy, shifting emphasis away from raw materials, and re-aligning trade along a North-South as opposed to East-West axes (and even beyond to European markets!), Québec harnessed the NAFTA to proportionally expand its economic activity with the US at a rate greater than any other comparable Canadian region.<sup>92</sup> Effectively, the sovereigntist impulse is reinforced by the fact that,

“...Québec’s economic future is clearly in the NAFTA economic space, not Canadian ... Compared to the province’s trade dependence on the rest of Canada in 1995, let alone 1980, the economic costs of further loosening economic ties ... are now much reduced.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Lisé, “Is Québec...,” 25-26.

<sup>91</sup> Meadwell, “The Politics of Nationalism...,” 223.

<sup>92</sup> Lisé, “Is Québec...,” 25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Courchene, “The Changing Nature...,” 14.

But globalization also has a broader impact on weakening the Canadian confederation as a whole and has important implications for Ottawa's ability to positively form, let alone control the national agenda. Ottawa's current 'asymmetric' approach to federalism directly relates to the phenomenon in that,

“Globalization is uneven in its effects: economic integration can exacerbate regional inequalities, and thus provide a basis for nationalist attempts to seek better terms from the cores of dominant power centres.”<sup>94</sup>

Continental North American trade integration, across the board (and not only in Québec), is realigning itself on a North – South basis and it is becoming the norm for all provinces and regions in pursuit of their own versions of enhanced autonomy. Under such pressure, Ottawa can be expected to be relatively impotent in the face of Québec's demands for even more autonomy, either within Canada or outside of it.<sup>95</sup> For the moment, this globalizing impetus has precipitated a shift in Québec's demands from more political autonomy to demands for more access to federal revenues in order to exercise fully its existing constitutional powers in those realms of provincial jurisdiction (e.g., education, language, health, cities, citizenship, immigration, job training, etc.) which are also the purview of independent states.<sup>96</sup>

These effects are not limited to Québec. In effect, as technology induces the development of new economic and political ties around the globe,<sup>97</sup> inexorable reformative pressures are being applied to existing state boundaries and institutions

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<sup>94</sup>Dandeker, “Nationalism...,” 37.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas J. Courchene, “Pan-Canadian Provincialism – The New Federalism and the Old Constitution.” *Policy Options* 25, no. 10 (November, 2004): 24.

<sup>96</sup> Courchene, “The Changing Nature...,” 1.

<sup>97</sup> Latouche, “Globalization...,” 184-5.

worldwide. Relentless trans-national economic forces are spawning pluralistic and ethnic nationalist impulses everywhere.<sup>98</sup> Predictably, globalization's cross-border economic impact has an especially degenerative effect on multi-national confederations.

The reshaping of the global order has ... confirmed ... the desire of many nationalist movements to add to the 'border' heritage of the world ... Frontiers everywhere are disappearing, only to reconstitute themselves better ... forty-six new international borders were created in Europe between 1989 and 1994, a net gain of forty-three ... So borders no longer frighten, and the proposals of Québec, Catalonia, or Flanders to modify their own are no longer regarded as risible.<sup>99</sup>

In effect, globalization precipitates divisions within confederal states like Canada along group or regional lines thus forcing disintegration, the under-mining of established state authority, and exacerbating intrastate ethnic frictions and divisions.<sup>100</sup> As the globalization model would predict, nationalist impulses are especially strong in modern societies where, as happened in Québec with the Quiet Revolution, the emancipatory impact of capitalist markets, the division of labour, and the industrialization of transport and communication favour the development of liberal democracy. Under such conditions, and has happened in Québec, the advent of prosperous economic interdependence within the group and the development of uniform governing regimes reinforces ethnic nationalist initiatives like the *projet souverainiste*.<sup>101</sup> In effect, as Québec continues to form economic and political alliances that transcend and preclude

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<sup>98</sup> Michel Venne, "La Souveraineté à l'Heure de la Mondialisation," *Policy Options* 24, no. 9 (October, 2003): 50.

<sup>99</sup> Latouche, "Globalization..." 186.

<sup>100</sup> Dandeker, "Nationalism..." 37.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

the traditional confederal model, the forces of ‘globalization’ will continue to pull Canada and Québec apart.

### **EQUALITY IF NECESSARY, BUT NOT NECESSARILY EQUALITY: THE ILLUSION OF TWO EQUAL FOUNDING NATIONS**

Notwithstanding recent census reports indicating significant increases in the absolute provincial birthrate, whether measured on a demographic, economic or political scale, Québec’s relative stature in Canada is diminishing.<sup>102</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Québec possessed 30.7% of the Canadian population while in 1994, it accounted for only 24.9%. Unless recent spikes in numbers can be sustained, neither the long term trend in immigration, nor the lagging provincial fertility rate indicates that Québec can maintain its demographic weight in confederation over the long term.<sup>103</sup> Since 1963, Québec has suffered a net emigration of over 610,000 people. It has consistently been losing its best and brightest residents to other provinces and to the U.S. in numbers that exceed that of other Canadian provinces primarily as a result of poor economic conditions and restrictive language laws.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See Brian Hutchinson, “Provinces population in the west surges Atlantic Canada's Loss: B.C., Alberta bigger, but aren't getting more MPs.” *National Post*, 28 September 28, 2006. [article on-line]; available from <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=79288dc6-9664-4a78-8968-fb812661229d>; Internet; accessed 15 March, 2007. For the first time ever, the combined population of Alberta and BC surpassed that of Québec in 2006, if only slightly. Together, the population of Alberta and B.C. registered a population of 7,686,215 while Québec counted a population of 7,651,531. The increase is attributed mainly to immigration and not inter-provincial migration. The pattern of growth in B.C. and Alberta is expected to serve as a basis upon which to call for a redistribution federal parliament seats in their favour.

<sup>103</sup> Government of Canada, “Report on the Demographic Situation in Canada 1995,” Statistics Canada, 2006. [document on-line]; available from <http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=91-209-XIE1995000&ISSNOTE=1>; Internet; accessed 15 March, 2007, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Matthew Stevenson, “Canada's Other Brain Drain: The Continuing Exodus from Québec,” *Policy Options* 21, no. 8 (October, 2000): 63.

The birth rate in Québec jumped a significant 8% in 2006, and census data shows that between 2001 and 2006, Québec's population, which grew at a rate of 4.3%, was the second fastest in Canada.<sup>105</sup> The gains are attributed largely to Québec's improved economic situation under NAFTA and they have had the double effect of attracting relatively more immigrants and stemming the traditional interprovincial population "bleeding." Nonetheless, even at this remarkable rate, Québec's population growth was 25% slower than the rest of Canada's, as a whole, and the province saw its share of the Canadian population continue its nearly half-century trend of decline by reaching an all time low of 23.9%.<sup>106</sup>

These demographic trends threaten the fundamental notion of duality between the English and French linguistic groups that has been at the very heart and centre of Canadian unity since Confederation nearly a century and a half ago.<sup>107</sup> As a result, francophones in Québec, as a distinct minority in Canada, fear being overwhelmed by the immense Anglophone milieu that is the rest of North America.<sup>108</sup> The fundamental issue with Québec in Canada is the notion that Québec is losing its place within confederation. Québec is no longer considered a co-founding partner of confederation, distinct and on an equal par with the rest of Canada, but, rather, one province amongst ten. There is no apparent or obvious way to reconcile these two competing visions, one territorial (equal

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<sup>105</sup> See Dene Moore, "Baby boom hit Québec in 2006," *Canadian Press*, 13 March, 2007 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.canada.com/globaltv/Québec/story.html?id=fcc8d851-74f7-4635-9c98-0a490881b540>; Internet; accessed 15 March, 2007.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Parizeau, "The Case...", 69.

<sup>108</sup> Schmitt, "Ethnic Structure...", 3.

province) and one social (equal peoples).<sup>109</sup> In this perceived deterioration of their present and predictably future situation, it is rational and normal that *Québécois* nationalists should find renewed strength in arguments for separation from Canada.<sup>110</sup> Failing a reversal of adverse demographic trends and constitutional renewal designed to reinforce and officially recognize Québec's distinct and equal place in the Canadian confederation, and, insofar as they wish to see their language survive in North America, *Québécois* are faced with the 'Hobson's choice' of staying in a diminishing federal situation or secession.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the proposals of numerous constitutional reforms designed to elaborate a new formula for managing relations between Québec and Ottawa, political dissatisfaction is widespread and no set of constitutional proposals has been accepted by all stakeholders.<sup>112</sup> With the Meech Lake accord, the Canadian federal government attempted to moderate Québec's constitutional demands for recognition as a distinct society, by providing it with increased powers over immigration, the ability to appoint Supreme Court judges, enhanced discretionary spending powers related to transfer payments and the right to veto federal constitutional amendments. In the wake of the failure of the accord to be ratified by all provincial legislatures by 23 June, 1990, support

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<sup>109</sup> Holsti "From Khartoum to Québec...", 164.

<sup>110</sup> Dion, "Why is Secession Difficult...", 273.

<sup>111</sup> Francois Vaillancourt, "The Economics of Constitutional Options for Québec and Canada," *Canadian Business Economics* (Winter, 1998): 13.

<sup>112</sup> Astroff, "Make Up...", 18.

for sovereignty soared in Québec and the popular appeal of sovereignty association skyrocketed to an all-time high of 60%.<sup>113</sup>

In the eyes of separatist leaders, the introduction of the Canadian constitution in 1982, in particular, had changed the dynamic of the French – English duality by reducing Québec’s ability to make laws on issue of language and education. All parties in the provincial Assemblée nationale unanimously rejected it.<sup>114</sup> Two provincial documents, the Allaire Report (commissioned by the Québec Liberal Party in 1991) and the (nominally federalist) Bélanger-Campeau Commission report (1990), collectively determined that there were two choices for Québec; either independence or a profoundly altered federal system. Subsequently, Québec’s Bill 150, in particular, specified a dateline of 26 October, 1992 for a referendum on ‘sovereignty association’ should Canada not offer a satisfactory constitutional alternative.<sup>115</sup>

Especially in the wake of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, the federal government was determined, to pre-empt a second Québec referendum by establishing several fact-finding commissions of its own (i.e., most importantly the Spicer Commission, the Beaudoin-Edwards Committee and the Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee) with a view to determining what Canadians desired from another potential round of constitutional negotiations with Québec.<sup>116</sup> A second federal effort to appease Québec’s concerns culminated in the Charlottetown Accord that incorporated the results of the various consultative groups. The effort aimed to be comprehensive in its approach,

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<sup>113</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 14-15.

<sup>114</sup> Parizeau, “The Case...,” 69.

<sup>115</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 13-14.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

addressing, notably, not only the question of Québec but the granting of constitutional status to other ‘distinct’ groups, also (e.g., First Nations through self-government).<sup>117</sup>

The Charlottetown Accord was soundly defeated by a margin of nearly 55% and it was rejected by the electorate in six of the ten Canadian provinces (*including* Québec) in a Canadian national referendum in late 1992.<sup>118</sup> The repatriation of the 1982 Canadian constitution, which relegated the province of Québec status to ‘one amongst equals’ and rejected its distinctiveness, could not be accepted and ratified by *les Québécois*.

Especially given that the constitution recognizes the unique cultural heritage of the minority First Nations peoples, a significant majority of *Québécois* continues to believe that Canada cannot perpetually exist while one of the ‘two founding nations’ sees its own distinct claims rejected by exclusion from the constitution.<sup>119</sup> In the words of separatist leader Jacques Parizeau, “Québecers ... live in a country that refuses to acknowledge their existence. They are told either to conform with a vision of Canada they do not share or to leave.”<sup>120</sup> Consequently, the rejection of Québec’s distinct society notion, perhaps more than any other issue, precipitated and fuelled the separatist impulse leading to the 1995 Québec Referendum on sovereignty and its near victory for the separatist side of the question.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Roger Gibbins, “Three Scenarios for the Future of Canada.” in *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 7-17 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 11.

<sup>118</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Pratte, “Mr. Ignatieff’s Right...”

<sup>120</sup> Parizeau, “The Case...,” 70.

<sup>121</sup> Balthazar, “Québec...,” 40.

## CONFEDERATION'S LAST GASP: THE LIMITS OF ASYMMETRIC FEDERALISM

Far from appeasing the *Québécois* desire for sovereignty, the close run defeat of the 1995 referendum reinforced the notion of just how far Québec is from giving consent and a desire to remain in Canada. No change to the constitution will ever convince hard line separatists to alter their position. The fundamental lack of recognition of Québec's distinctiveness in the Canadian constitution continues to sour even the most steadfast federalists in Québec. From the early 1990's to today, the maintenance of the constitutional status quo has not precipitated the resolution of any of Québec's issues or reduced its political grievances. Underlying political problems continue to fester and are still extant.<sup>122</sup>

“Québec's dream of Canadian federalism is more and more remote from reality. It seems almost impossible for the moment, given the parameters of the 1982 Constitution ... for Québécois to keep two political identities.”<sup>123</sup>

Indeed, polling conducted in Québec almost ten years after the 1995 referendum indicates that, despite the huge socioeconomic progress made to date, up to 64% of *Québécois* feel that francophones do not get the respect they need within the Canadian confederation.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, an increasing number of *Québécois* (70%) feel that Anglophones outside of Québec see francophones as inferior.<sup>125</sup> With an unresolved

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<sup>122</sup> Peter Haydon, “General Security Analysis of the Scenarios,” In *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 27-37 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 31.

<sup>123</sup> Balthazar “Québec...,” 51.

<sup>124</sup> Centre for Research and Information on Canada. “Québec – Sovereignty Support...,” 3.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

constitutional situation and *Québécois* voter intentions unchanged,<sup>126</sup> the profound attraction of the “sovereignist project” is still deeply rooted in Québec.<sup>127</sup> Québec’s nationalist impulse in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, has momentarily shifted away from more demands for autonomy and sovereignty towards acquiring the fiscal resources necessary to experience the full range of powers guaranteed under the constitution, as imperfect as it is, to other provinces.<sup>128</sup> A significant majority of *Québécois*, whether nationalist or not, see a strong and dominant role for the province, unmolested by the federal government, in education, health, energy, the environment and immigration policy.<sup>129</sup> In effect, much of the *projet souverainiste* can be achieved within a loosely decentralized, asymmetric federal construct. For the moment, the general sentiment is that “...Québec can thrive as a nation within the Canadian state, because the powers necessary for meaningful nationhood in century 21 are primarily provincial powers.”<sup>130</sup>

However, decentralization and the continued devolution of powers along the lines of asymmetric federalism are dangerous for Ottawa while they facilitate the separatist agenda. NAFTA, globalization, and asymmetrical federalism permit the development of huge variances in regional living standards, competitiveness and cohesion. This state of affairs requires the imposition of standards from Ottawa “in selected areas of provincial jurisdiction”<sup>131</sup> while it leaves the regions to pursue their own interests without any

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<sup>126</sup> Durand, “The Evolution...,” 13.

<sup>127</sup> Gagné and Langlois, “Is Separatism Dead...,” 39.

<sup>128</sup> Courchene, “Pan-Canadian Provincialism...,” 21.

<sup>129</sup> Centre for Research and Information on Canada. “Québec – Sovereignty Support...,” 3.

<sup>130</sup> Courchene, “Pan-Canadian Provincialism...,” 25.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

notion of interprovincial fairness or equality.<sup>132</sup> Increasing economic disparity and the provincial –federal imbalance is causing huge pressures on the Canadian confederation.

Increasingly lost in the chorus of provincial grievances is any sense that a common Canadian citizenship has much practical implication, other than ... increasingly disparate ... [social policies]. Because some sense of shared commitment to a Canadian polity can be seen as a general precondition for the give-and-take that effective democratic governance requires, many of the impacts of greater provincialism are hard to distinguish from the general dysfunctionality of the Canadian federation.<sup>133</sup>

Québec’s current impulse towards more autonomy finds strength in alliance with coincident inclinations on the part of other provinces.<sup>134</sup> In the same way that the protection of the wealthy “Alberta Advantage” has given way to a ‘don’t tread on me’ “firewall” interpretation of provincial rights, it is reasonable to expect more provincial demands for autonomy and even sovereignty in Québec as it, too, becomes more prosperous.<sup>135</sup> If Québec’s drive for more autonomy within the Canadian state are frustrated by the limits of asymmetric federalism, it is logical to expect a resurfacing of the extant sovereignist grievances along the lines of the pre-1995 referendum

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<sup>132</sup> André Bruelle, “Fédéralisme au Québec, Unitarisme dans le ROC?” *Policy Options* 25, no. 10 (November, 2004): 37.

<sup>133</sup> Lars Osberg, “Pulling Apart – The Growing Gulfs in Canadian Society,” *Policy Options* 27, no. 4 (April – May, 2006): 54.

<sup>134</sup> See Alan Gregg, “Québec’s Final Victory,” *Walrus*, 3 February, 2005. Current Québec aspirations towards more independence and autonomy are based on interprovincialism as voiced through the council of the federation of premiers squaring off against Ottawa with a view to reducing the federal-provincial fiscal imbalance, recovering tax points from Ottawa, limiting federal spending power and gaining a greater provincial role in international treaties and agreements (e.g., WTO, FTAA, etc.).

<sup>135</sup> Courchene, “Pan-Canadian Provincialism...,” 24.

constitutional struggles.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, Québec already enjoys a relatively high level of autonomy in the political arena. The step to nation-hood would not be so huge as ...

...decentralization induces a confidence in regional self-capacity that may nourish secessionism. A real sovereign Québec state seems within reach, and many Québeckers view any intervention from the federal government as a useless – if not harmful – intrusion in Québec affairs.<sup>137</sup>

## THE BOUCHARD EFFECT

The popular appeal of the *projet souverainist* was closely correlated with the rise of charismatic *PQ* leader and Québec premier (1976-1985) René Levesque.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, the role of the charismatic leader has been recognized as being more important in social movements and, in particular, nationalist movements, than in other enterprises. Strong, charismatic leaders have been key to the relative success of the sovereignist movement in Québec. Notably René Lévesque and Lucien Bouchard stand out as the examples of extremely popular figures who, in terms of popularity, widely surpassed their contemporaries.<sup>139</sup>

Prior to the 1995 referendum, for example, the resurgence of the nationalist cause and, indeed, the closeness of that referendum's results, have been attributed to the late implication and energization of the campaign by the charismatic leader of the federal *Bloc Québécois*, Lucien Bouchard.<sup>140</sup> The “Bouchard effect” was especially valuable in

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<sup>136</sup> Courchene, “The Changing Nature...,” 31.

<sup>137</sup> Dion, “Why is Secession Difficult...,” 279-280.

<sup>138</sup> Astroff, “Make Up...,” 6.

<sup>139</sup> Maurice Pinard, “L’Effet Bouchard,” *Policy Options* 18, no. 3 (October, 1997): 34.

<sup>140</sup> Denis Stairs, *Canada and Québec After Québécois Secession: “Realist” Reflections on an International Relationship* (Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 1996), 6.

swaying undecided voters within the context of constitutional struggles such as Lake Meech.<sup>141</sup> Polls show that during the 1995 referendum, ‘soft nationalists’ and undecided voters were largely convinced to put aside their economic fears regarding the uncertainties of sovereignty association due largely to Bouchard’s efforts. Over the course of the pre-referendum campaign, he constantly hammered away on the message of the inevitability of some type of subsequent association or partnership with the rest of Canada and very nearly carried the vote.

In general, external factors, such as political leadership and an ability to appeal to emotions and prejudices, have been demonstrated as being capable of swaying voter intentions by up to 23% in the heat of a referendum campaign.<sup>142</sup> Bouchard, for example, leveraged the moderate message to sway the soft nationalist vote by adding the notion of a political partnership to the idea of some kind of economic association with the rest of Canada. Bolstered by NAFTA, he argued that the continental political and economic situation would not allow for isolation of Québec.<sup>143</sup> In effect,

... a charismatic and clever secessionist leadership [e.g., in the mould of a Levesque or Bouchard] facing weak and divided pro-union forces, a period of confusion, or the unexpected acrimony of constitutional negotiations may provide the unusual conditions necessary for secession. A source of fear or confidence, whether it is cultural, economic or political, may suddenly emerge at the top of the agenda, to the point of overcoming the *fear-confidence* antithetical effects.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Pinard, “L’Effet Bouchard,” 35.

<sup>142</sup> Centre for Research and Information on Canada, “Québec – Sovereignty...,” 2.

<sup>143</sup> Pinard, “L’Effet Bouchard,” 35-36.

<sup>144</sup> Dion, “Why is Secession Difficult...,” 275.

## THE WINNING CONDITIONS

Thus are established the so-called ‘winning conditions’ for an eventual future referendum on Québec sovereignty. Ultimately, the innate and immutable *Québécois* impulse for national self-expression, which matured and came to the fore during the Quiet Revolution, has not subsided. Indeed, the contrary is true. Through political and constitutional struggles which aimed at ascertaining and establishing Québec’s ‘rightful’ place in the Canadian confederation, it was the institution of the Québec government which evolved as the primary defensive bulwark against the relentless erosion and isolation of *la nation Québécoise* caused by the onslaught of the rest of ‘English’ Canada. The ethno-nationalist roots of the French-Canadian ideal of distinctiveness have naturally evolved into the broader, more legitimate and more powerful *Québécois* notion of civic nationalism. Given the liberal democratic antecedents of the nationalist movement and the rejection of violence as a means to political change (reflected in the demise of the *FLQ*), it is rational that the idea of democratic expression through referenda, should be recognized by both sides, Canadian Federalist and *Québécois* separatist, alike, as a legitimate means of decision.

Fundamental questions concerning the economic impact of separation and the relative value of the Canadian confederal framework remained decisive, however, in restraining the necessary level of electoral support for sovereignty. Indeed, referendum results have consistently fallen short of the ‘50% + 1’ mark needed to secure a mandate for secession. First, on the question of economic security, the issue has evolved from one of ensuring economic association with Canada, to one of benefiting from the liberating qualities of globalization and free trade. In effect, the contemporary globalized economic

construct underlines the notion that *les Québécois* do not need the rest of ‘English’ Canada to create an economically successful and self-sufficient state. Globalization has removed the difficult obstacle of ‘sovereignty association’ on the road to Québec independence and it would be counter intuitive to expect that continued and widening free trade would not prolong and strengthen the *Québécois* sovereignty project.

Secondly, the value of Québec’s continued political union within the Canadian federal framework is in relative decline. To be sure, the Quiet Revolution culminated in important social reforms within Québec, economic progress, a reaffirmation of the sanctity of democratic forms of expression and the legislative retrenchment of French language rights at both the provincial and federal levels of government. Despite these important autonomist gains in *absolute* terms in realms not dissimilar to those exercised by an independent state (e.g., taxation, education, linguistic policy, immigration, trade and, to a limited degree, foreign policy), Québec’s *relative* place in confederation, when measured in terms of political power, economic strength or sheer demographics, is being displaced and reduced.

The national rejection of both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords underlined the limits of national accommodation and tacitly signalled the high water mark and implicit reversal of the traditional Canadian English – French nation-founding duality. The extremely close results of the second sovereignty referendum in 1995 underscored the depth of the *Québécois* sense of betrayal and affinity for sovereignty. Subsequent initiatives such as ‘asymmetric federalism’ and the unrelenting contortioning of the Canadian federal system to provide more autonomy for all provinces, not only Québec, must, logically, have their financial and political limits at some point.

Fundamentally, Québec has been excluded from the Canadian constitution and it would be disingenuous to conclude that its fundamental grievances can be redressed within the current context of its relatively diminishing economic and demographic importance within an evolving confederation.

The sovereignist agenda is reinforced the longer Québec's place in Canada remains unresolved while the province garners growing economic confidence in independence. Thus, the conditions are set for evermore-popular sovereignty referenda. The socioeconomic and political conditions that propelled the father of the modern *Québécois* separatist movement, the charismatic René Levesque, to pose the first question on separation in 1980 are relatively more important today than they were thirty years ago. Moreover, the question of economic confidence that stymied the compelling Lucien Bouchard has, demonstrably, been overcome. Although the separatist movement in Québec at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century appears to be in relative disarray and in a period of transition,<sup>145</sup> the fundamental conditions that have traditionally driven *le projet souverainiste* (i.e., popular electoral support, economic security and political disaffection) are still extant and stronger than ever. The only piece currently missing in the sovereignist puzzle is compelling separatist leadership in the same mould as the

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<sup>145</sup> In the wake of the 2007 Québec provincial elections, which saw the emergence of the first minority government in Québec in almost 130 years and the *PQ* displaced as the official opposition in the *Assemblée nationale*, there appears to be broad consensus that the sovereignist impulse, far from waning, has naturally evolved to conform to contemporary *Québécois* notions of independence and how to get there. See Clairandrée Cauchy, "La souveraineté peut-elle survivre?" *Le Devoir*, 31 March, 07. [article on-line]; available from <http://www.ledevoir.com/2007/03/31/137743.html>; Graeme Hamilton, "Sovereignty Gets Called into Service," *National Post*, 26 March, 2007 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/story.html?id=0496ba59-e204-4906-98a7-a8dd5f7be2c3&k=28577>; Gilles Laporte, "D'un nationalisme à l'autre," *La Presse*, 1 April, 2007 [commentary on-line]; available from <http://www.cyberpresse.ca/article/20070401/CPOPINIONS/704010565/5288/CPOPINIONS>; and Rex Murpy, "Separatism by Another Name," *Globe and Mail*, 31 March, 2007 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070330.wcorex0331/BNStory/specialComment;Internet>; all accessed 1 April, 2007.

charismatic *chefs* of times past capable of capturing and harnessing the separatist impulse and driving it to its logical electoral conclusion of success in a future referendum.

#### IV. PERFECT STORM RAGING: THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

*Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau during the October Crisis, 1970:*

*Reporter: "Sir what is it with all these men with guns around here?"*

*Trudeau " There's a lot of bleeding hearts around who don't like to see people with helmets and guns. All I can say is 'go ahead and bleed' but it's more important to keep law and order in this society than to be worried about weak-kneed people who don't like the looks of [it]."*

*Reporter: "At what cost? How far would you go? To what extent?"*

*Trudeau: "Well, just watch me."<sup>146</sup>*

#### THE INDEPENDENCE IMPULSE

With the foundations of the winning conditions for a future Québec referendum firmly established now and growing stronger with every passing ‘federally asymmetric’ and ‘globalized’ year, the question of Québec sovereignty has evolved from one of, “if?” to one of “when?”. Indeed,

... [no] region ... is as likely as Québec to become an independent country in the near future. Only in Québec does one find a secessionist party with a good hope of winning a referendum on political independence.<sup>147</sup>

Although the 1995 Québec referendum on sovereignty specifically emphasized the pursuit of sovereignty association with the rest of Canada as the basic ballot question, separatist leaders explicitly acknowledge that outright national independence is, at least

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<sup>146</sup> Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Televised ‘scrum’ interview with CBC reporter Tim Rafe, House of Commons, Ottawa, (16 October, 1970) [text on-line]; available from [http://history.cbc.ca/history/?Mlval=EpisContent&series\\_id=1&episode\\_id=16&chapter\\_id=1&page\\_id=4&lang=E](http://history.cbc.ca/history/?Mlval=EpisContent&series_id=1&episode_id=16&chapter_id=1&page_id=4&lang=E); Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>147</sup> Dion, “Why is Secession Difficult...,” 275.

implicitly, the ultimate objective of any such vote.<sup>148</sup> Following a ‘Yes’ victory, the *Assemblée nationale* would be able to proclaim the sovereignty of Québec. Even in the event of an extremely narrow ‘50% + 1’ margin, the separatist logic posits that Ottawa would have no other rational choice but to negotiate or begin acknowledging at least “soft independence” for Québec with the understanding that extant trade procedures, population mobility provisions, borders and monetary union with the rest of Canada would not be adjusted.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, the *PQ* approach to sovereignty following a referendum “Yes” vote explicitly included a transition period of one year to facilitate the negotiation of difficult socio-economic, trade and other issues prior to ascension to full independence.<sup>150</sup>

The broad appeal of *indépendantiste* aspirations were best captured in the tripartite agreement signed by the leaders of the *Bloc Québécois*, *Parti Québécois* and *Action Démocratique du Québec* four months prior to the 1995 referendum which proposed “new Economic and Political partnership” between a sovereign Québec and the rest of Canada. The agreement eventually passed into provincial legislation as “An Act Respecting the Future of Québec” and stipulated that, in the event of a positive referendum mandate on the question of sovereignty association, Québec would be independent in all facets of the word; reserving powers to make all laws, impose all

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<sup>148</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Joseph T. Jockel, “On Watching, from Across the Border, the Canadian Game of Chicken.” *Annals of American Academy of Political Science* 538 (March, 1995): 18.

<sup>150</sup> Parizeau, “The Case...,” 74.

taxes, write its own constitution and make all treaties while seeking a special, economically advantageous partnership with the rest of Canada.<sup>151</sup>

The exceedingly complex and acrimonious task of extricating Québec from Canada in the event of such a de facto ‘unilateral declaration of independence’ following a separation vote, would strain relations, undermine unified federal action on a whole host of issues (including defence) and hobble Ottawa for, perhaps, years.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, by virtue of legislative fiat, the institutional foundation for conflict in the wake of a referendum ‘Yes’ vote has already been laid. The post-referendum federal “Clarity Act” passed in 2000 by the Canadian parliament makes any unilateral declaration of independence by Québec unconstitutional and confers on Ottawa the status of ‘intervener’ in any referendum process seen as duly unfair or biased. It also reserves the right of the federal government to declare the results invalid if not deemed representative or sufficiently legitimate.<sup>153</sup> Even before it was passed into Canadian federal law, Québec legislators saw the ‘Clarity Act’ as confrontational and an unlawful intrusion by the federal level into the realm of provincial jurisdiction.<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, and in direct response, the *Assemblée nationale* introduced, in emergency session only two days after the promulgation of the ‘Clarity Act’, legislation that quickly became law re-affirming Québec’s unique right to self-determination and implicitly rejecting the import of the

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<sup>151</sup> Simeon, “Limits to Partnership...,” 7-8.

<sup>152</sup> Gibbins, “Three Scenarios...,” 14-5.

<sup>153</sup> See Government of Canada, “Clarity Act (2000, chapter 26) An Act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Québec Secession Reference,” [document on-line]; available from <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-31.8/index.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>154</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 75.

federal act.<sup>155</sup> With the stage thus set for institutional and legal confrontation in the face of an eventual referendum ‘Yes’ vote, Ottawa’s legitimacy and ability to accept, negotiate or reject the expected and logical de facto Québec declaration of independence, when it comes, promises to be contentious, indeed.<sup>156</sup>

## SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR CONFRONTATION

Throughout the 1990’s extensive contemporary analysis suggested that, for Canada, one of four possible outcomes of the Québec sovereignty debate was eventually likely ranging from maintenance of the status quo to an independent ‘clean break’, passing by either some form of renewed federalism or sovereignty association.<sup>157</sup> For the moment, in the wake of the calamitous 1995 referendum and unfaltering popular *Québécois* support for sovereignty, Ottawa appears to have rejected the first option of maintaining the status quo in favour of the second; pursuing ‘asymmetric’ attempts at renewing the federation.<sup>158</sup> As asymmetric socioeconomic development in Canada exacerbates regional cleavages and continues to undermine an increasingly decentralized and weakened federal government, reinvigorated sovereignist impulses are predictable.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> See Astroff, “Make Up...,” 20 and Government of Québec, “Bill 99 (2000, chapter 46) An Act respecting the exercise of the fundamental rights and prerogatives of the Québec people and the Québec State” (Québec: Official Publisher, 2000) [document on-line]; available from <http://www2.publicationsduQuebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSearch/telecharge.php?type=5&file=2000C46A.PDF>; Internet; accessed 11 March, 2007.

<sup>156</sup> See Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 4. In the face of a de facto move towards sovereignty in Québec, Ottawa’s options would, essentially be reduced to one of the three options of either accepting, negotiating or rejecting the fait accompli.

<sup>157</sup> See Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 1 and Gibbins, “Three Scenarios...,” 8-10.

<sup>158</sup> Courchene, “Pan-Canadian Provincialism...,” 20.

<sup>159</sup> Osberg, “Pulling Apart...,” 54.

With the status quo abandoned, when asymmetric federalism exhausts itself for want of central funding or political support, the remaining *Québécois* options will be reduced to either some form of sovereignty association or independence. How and when the sovereignist impulse will manifest itself remains to be seen. All scenarios following a referendum ‘Yes’ vote, however, anticipate important economic and other various difficulties for Canada ranging from the requirement for accelerated and legitimate decision-making processes, possible outbreaks of violence, pending collapse of the Canadian state and political stupor on the part of federal representatives.<sup>160</sup>

Essentially, two broad views of Canada and Québec in the post-secession environment emerge. Both parties to the ‘divorce’, the Canadian federal government and the newly sovereign, if not fully independent, state of Québec, would face potentially lengthy negotiations and considerable economic loss from the secession process. Both sides would have strong incentives to settle their immense differences quickly within a relatively amicable atmosphere.<sup>161</sup> One scenario predicts that, even with a minute majority, internal and external forces in Québec would push for a quick unilateral declaration of independence. The attendant shock to financial markets would send the Canadian dollar into a freefall, put capital in full flight out of the country and set the conditions for social unrest as Canadians saw the value of their savings and equity quickly evaporate. The longer the situation remained unresolved, the more severe would be the unfavourable economic impact on both Québec and the rest of Canada.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Dion, “The Dynamic of Secessions...,” 535.

<sup>161</sup> Dan Rowlands, “International Aspects of the Division of Debt under Secession: The Case of Québec and Canada,” *Canadian Public Policy* 23, no. 1 (March, 1997): 49.

<sup>162</sup> In *The Secession of Québec and the Future of Canada*. (Montreal: McGill – Queen’s University Press, 1998), 184-191, Robert A. Young argues illogically, unconvincingly, and contrary to

Sovereignist leaders would be triumphant and supported by rallying followers while the rest of Canada, meanwhile, would be in disarray and would have to negotiate quickly in order to check further economic disruption, political collapse and potential international intervention. A second view would see the separation process more drawn out and negotiated, sobered by the prospect of a foundering economic situation.<sup>163</sup>

The basic dichotomy of any post secession scenario is apparent. In order to forestall predictably adverse economic impacts, the remainder of the rest of Canada would be faced with the impossible task of dealing quickly and efficiently with a quasi-independent Québec. The propensity for socioeconomic instability would grow, the longer it would take to for Ottawa and Québec to settle potential differences. Given the restraints of the 'Clarity Act', immediate acceptance of a Québec declaration of independence, without any form of protest or contemplation, would be legally impossible for Ottawa. Moreover, even if negotiation in the best of faith, removed from any and all forms of emotive or irrational reaction, was Ottawa's intention, the legitimacy of any Canadian contact group or negotiating team, in the face of the recently disintegrated federation, would be disputable.

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significant historical, organizational and socioeconomic analysis, that economic uncertainty, alone, will drive a newly independent Québec and rest of Canada to quickly, cohesively and efficiently settle their potential differences. Young contends that a rapidly reconstituted federal government, benefiting from some undefined base of legitimacy, would, contrary to existing federal legislation, capitulate in the face of whatever positions a Québec government may take. Young concedes that "Although negotiations will be fast, they will not be easy..." but offers no substantive rational explanation as to how a newly independent Québec and fundamentally destabilized Canadian government could promptly address the deep-seated socioeconomic differences that they could not resolve together when working together under the federal umbrella.

<sup>163</sup> Simeon, "Limits to Partnership...", 23.

In the same vein, any action by Ottawa interpreted by Québec as a challenge to its legal and legitimately expressed popular democratic voice would be problematic.<sup>164</sup> Hesitation and even refusal on the part of what remained of the Canadian federal government would generate resistance from Québec.<sup>165</sup> Even under the most benign scenarios where Ottawa would efficiently acquiesce in the face of a legitimate declaration of Québec sovereignty, follow-on negotiations would be difficult and the possibility of civil disobedience, sporadic outbreaks of violence and, potentially, violent insurrection would be ever more likely as socioeconomic challenges remained unresolved.<sup>166</sup> Accordingly, Québec's separation from the rest of Canada would occur under any combination of exploding, disintegrating or devolving confederal systems.<sup>167</sup>

Historically and statistically, internal civil conflicts are much less likely to end in negotiated settlement than interstate wars due to long standing inherent grievances and perceived injustices by one community towards another.<sup>168</sup> For its part, Québec would resent any intrusion into its internal affairs and would be expected to resist any inclination on the part of what remained of Canada to subjugate, exploit or stifle the legitimate purview the new Québec state. Indeed, Québec's aspirations to independence may be helped along by an indifferent if not pointedly hostile rest of Canada still seething

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<sup>164</sup> Any perceived affront or intrusion by Ottawa in the event of a Québec declaration of independence would, by definition, be seen as a hostile act by Québec. See Government of Québec. "Bill 99..."

<sup>165</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 82.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>167</sup> Job, "The Experience..." 155-7.

<sup>168</sup> Stephen J. Stedman, *International Actors and Internal Conflicts* (New York: Friendship Creative Printers, 1999), 5.

from being handed a separatist fait accompli in the form of independence.<sup>169</sup> The Clarity Act and the imposition of unrealistic referendum thresholds by the federal government, is seen as “francophobia” by *Québécois* nationalists and elevates extremism and exacerbating tensions on the question of sovereignty. “The task of the partisans of dialogue and intercultural understanding is not facilitated by the emergence of this unforeseen ethno-cultural extremism.”<sup>170</sup> The political separation of the two founding nations would be relatively easy. Dividing the spoils from their shattered union would not.

### **THE REST OF CANADA’S REACTION**

In the event of a referendum ‘Yes’ vote in favour of separation, Québec and Canada will both be heavily impacted. Geography imposes cooperation or a lack thereof, mutual stability or instability, mutual security or insecurity and mutual prosperity or hardship on both parties.<sup>171</sup> From Ottawa’s side, three reciprocally dependent indicators will govern the way the Canadian federal government interacts with Québec following an expression of sovereignty, or declaration of independence: the level of acceptance by the federal government, the level of cooperation between the federal government and Québec and the level of accompanying friction, conflict and violence that consequently erupts.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Jockel, “On Watching, from Across the Border...,” 24.

<sup>170</sup> Latouche, “Globalization...,” 195.

<sup>171</sup> John Halstead, “The International Diplomatic Reaction.” in *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 131-140 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 137.

<sup>172</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 80.

Québec's desire for partnership would run up against a profound sense of treachery harboured by the remaining political stakeholders in the rest of the Canadian federation.

It would be an immense stretch for those outside Québec to move from the anger, hostility, loss of confidence, and sense of betrayal that a decision to secede would produce to a calm, deliberate, cost-benefit analysis of partnership.<sup>173</sup>

With a view to mitigating the disruptive effects of an eventual unilateral declaration of independence by Québec, two negotiating options would exist for Ottawa. The first would be to negotiate prior to the event (which is historically unsupportable). The second option would be to negotiate after the fact, in accordance with the stated desires of the *PQ*. The ability of the remaining federal government to negotiate effectively, however, would be unlikely given the “emotional shock” of separation and the resulting federal disarray likely to ensue.<sup>174</sup>

Indeed, the record of deliberation, to date, provides an indication of what to expect in the future. Throughout the decades of momentous constitutional debate leading up to the 1995 referendum, Canada's national leadership failed the country terribly. Federal government hesitation to publicly study or comment on the prospect of Québec separation was seen as undermining the public trust and an abdication of responsibility as it implied apathy towards the issue and defeatism.<sup>175</sup> Judging by performance in the last 1995 referendum, the federal government would be ready to contest any future ascension to sovereignty (‘Plan B’) and challenge the legitimacy of the referendum every step of the

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<sup>173</sup> Simeon, “Limits to Partnership...,” 30.

<sup>174</sup> Halstead, “The International Diplomatic Reaction,” 134-5.

<sup>175</sup> Alex Morrison, “Introductory Essay,” in *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, vii-ix (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), viii.

way.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, the immediate result of a Yes vote in a Québec sovereignty referendum would be “...panic, fear and uncertainty in the ROC [rest of Canada]. ... A lamentably unprepared public would be fearful about its future and angry with those it held responsible.”<sup>177</sup> The emotional shock to the rest of Canada would revolve around a “fundamental and unprecedented challenge to the country’s core values, identity, sense of self, and institutions – the most profound it has ever faced.”<sup>178</sup> Psychological disorientation and a lack of preparedness would give way to anger and federal representative institutions would be de-legitimized and destabilized.

... Canadians and their government in the rest of Canada ... may mismanage the terms of secession, making more difficult a subsequent harmonious coexistence with an independent Québec; and the ROC may bungle the fashioning of a new constitution for those left in the truncated Canada that nobody sought.<sup>179</sup>

The rest of Canada would be thrown in to a “full-blown legitimacy crisis” to ratify the very existence of Canada. The existing de-legitimized government of the rest of Canada would have to be reconstituted, along with the re-making of the constitution, so “as to make it responsible to the citizens of Canada alone.”<sup>180</sup> The federal re-organization and consultation process would be long and laborious, without mentioning any resolution of the relative status of Québec.<sup>181</sup> Québec’s separation, including anything beyond even an asymmetric revitalization of the federation, would probably

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<sup>176</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 85.

<sup>177</sup> Cairns, “Looking into the Abyss...,” 216.

<sup>178</sup> Simeon, “Limits to Partnership...,” 17.

<sup>179</sup> Cairns, “Looking into the Abyss...,” 200.

<sup>180</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 13.

<sup>181</sup> Philip Resnick, *Canada at the Cross-Roads*, Remarks presented at the “Canada at the Forks Conference,” Calgary, Alberta, 26 October, 1996.

lead to a disintegration of the rest of Canada along regional lines.<sup>182</sup> The most likely federal result would be a loosely grouped confederation of quasi-autonomous states consisting of Western Canada, Ontario and the Maritimes.<sup>183</sup> Federal responses would be fractured as competing regional agendas undermined a coherent federal front. Indeed, federal efforts to rescind and restrict Québec's secession could be driven, conceivably, by overall efforts to keep the federation together and intact. The consequent ground centre of political power, diluted as it would be across disparate provincial jurisdictions, would be weakened by lack of jurisdictional power and little political authority.<sup>184</sup>

Following a yes vote, Québec would enjoy a relative advantage over a disorganized and disconsolate rest of Canada. While a referendum victory would be a legitimizing affirmation of the *nation Québécoise*, an independent Québec would already have all of its institutions in place and ready to function with a pre-existing plan (e.g., in the form of the Bélanger-Campeau commission), already in place.<sup>185</sup> The Sovereignist desire for a sovereignty association as enunciated by *PQ* policies is predicated, however, on the notion of the rest of Canada reacting in monolithic terms to Québec secession. This unrealistic expectation would undermine the *PQ* desire to build a "two-unit confederation" as the rest of Canada's preoccupation with its own immediate self-interest and reorganization would determine levels, substance and quality of reactions across a myriad of business, provincial and regional sectors that would not necessarily conform to

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<sup>182</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 10-1.

<sup>183</sup> Simeon, "Limits to Partnership...", 30.

<sup>184</sup> Gibbins, "Three Scenarios...", 14.

<sup>185</sup> Cairns, "Looking into the Abyss...", 216.

the realization of amicable and mutually beneficial relations.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, a smooth post-secession Québec – Ottawa partnership along the lines of the sovereignty association model advocated by the *PQ* would be highly unlikely and well nigh impossible to pursue realistically, making attainment of what *Québécois* have been promised coming out of separation highly problematic and unrealistic.<sup>187</sup>

Moreover, a possible result of separation might be a revitalized rest of Canada, energized by the anger of divorce and freed from the necessity of accommodating Québec. The renewed Canadian federation, susceptible to exploitation by potentially extremist regionally based political parties (e.g., Conservative / Reform, NDP, Green, etc.) and absent a strong mitigating caucus from Québec, would find strength in a common language, a common commitment to a reinforced Constitution and Charter of Rights, and support for a strong national government with more effective forms of regional representation.<sup>188</sup> Under such conditions,

Appeals for assistance from anglophone communities [amplified by aboriginal claims for assistance] trying to secede from Québec would find a more sympathetic ear; the notion of a new Québec confined to the north shore of the St. Lawrence, and running from the centre of Montreal to Québec City, could have considerable appeal in new Canada built on the renunciation of bicultural and bilingual founding myths.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Simeon, “Limits to Partnership...”, 2.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> See Gibbins, “Three Scenarios...”, 15 and Vaillancourt, “The Economics of Constitutional Options...”, 3-14. Vaillancourt estimates that the rest of Canada, relieved of the burden of supporting an economically under-performing Québec, would see its GDP and GDP per capita jump by 1%.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Potential disputes over federal property, infrastructure, equipment and personnel, (including military); international agreements; native land claims; and minority communities would be priority items for resolution.<sup>190</sup>

The defence of minority rights and protection of federal property, in particular, would present unique challenges, especially within the context of a Canadian administrative vacuum accompanying any federal political reorganization.<sup>191</sup> While political and social interests would pull confederal impulses in varying directions, the remaining legislative construct would constrain federal responses to Québec independence. Apart from the federally binding ‘Clarity Act’, Ottawa’s initial response to a declaration of independence would be guided by the Québec secession reference question submitted by the federal government to the Supreme Court of Canada in 1989. In the words of chief justice Antonio Lamer, it resulted in the most important judgement in the court’s history by rejecting the notion that Québec could, according to Canadian or international law, legally withdraw from Canada unilaterally.<sup>192</sup> In the face of the pressing unresolved issues related to Québec following a referendum “Yes” vote noted above, the federal government would be hard-pressed to not capitulate its own interests. Even in the face of rising public sentiment against reaction, and, constrained by other legislation extant in the federal ‘Emergencies Act’ and ‘National Defence Act’,<sup>193</sup> Ottawa

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<sup>190</sup> Piromalli, *Canada’s Domestic Security...*, 86-9.

<sup>191</sup> Haydon, “General Security Analysis...,” 30.

<sup>192</sup> Mark D. Walters, “Nationalism and the Pathology of Legal Systems: Considering the Québec Secession Reference and Its Lessons for the United Kingdom,” *The Modern Law Review* 62, no. 3 (May, 1999): 371-2.

<sup>193</sup> See Government of Canada, “Emergencies Act” (1985, c. 22 (4th Supp.)) [document on-line]; available from <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/E-4.5/>; and Government of Canada, “National Defence Act” (R.S., 1985, c. N-5) [document on-line]; available from <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/N-5/>; Internet; both

would be constrained to turn to potentially confrontational and repressive actions to restore law and order.

In the wake of a ‘Yes’ vote, whether the margin of victory was large or not, instability caused by the resistance of First Nations peoples, the anger of federal loyalists remaining in Québec, and the resulting potential border problems hold significant potential for violence. In the event of even low-level local disputes erupting within Québec because of perceived minority rights violations or other jurisdictional issues with the newly formed government of Québec following a unilateral declaration of independence, the Emergencies Act, in particular, would potentially force the federal government to intervene in the protection of its perceived related interests.<sup>194</sup>

Under such conditions, expectations of generous magnanimity on the part of what is left of the rest of Canada at forced post-separation negotiations would be impossibly misplaced and this highly volatile situation would be subject to the enflamed rhetoric of demagogues on both sides of the political equation.<sup>195</sup> The concept of sovereignty association, assuming it was a starting point for any such negotiations, is based upon an unlikely convergence of interests between the rest of Canada and a newly independent

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accessed 10 March, 2007. In *Canada's Domestic Security : The Role of the Canadian Forces in the Event of Québec Separation*. Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 2001, Michelle Piromalli argues that current federal legislation, being overly narrow in its focus, constrains Ottawa to pursuing a confrontational course of action in the event of Québec separation. Although she recognizes that the current Emergencies and National Defence Acts give the federal government more latitude for action than did, alone, the legacy ‘War Measures Act’ (Government of Canada, “War Measures Act - An Act to confer certain powers upon the Governor in Council in the event of War, Invasion, or Insurrection” (s.c. 1914 c. 2) [document on-line]; available from <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~sprague/wma.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.), the legislation is not sufficiently flexible to respond to all exigencies.

<sup>194</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 94.

<sup>195</sup> Cairns, “Looking into the Abyss...,” 217.

Québec.<sup>196</sup> Moreover, as Denis Stairs notes, generosity and amicability in the realm of international negotiations, as the interaction between Canada and an independent Québec would be, is typically displaced by pursuit of individual interest. From the rest of Canada's perspective, the post-secession dispute resolution dynamic would highly contentious, vulnerable to uncompromising extremist influences and see each side attempt to ensure that the other bore the greater cost of separation on the logic that the onus of carrying the cost would fall to Québec as the demander.<sup>197</sup>

## MINORITY ISSUES

Following Québec's separation from the rest of Canada, issues surrounding the status of minorities may prove to be the most contentious in terms of resistance to new authorities, potential violence and the precipitation of legally mandated intervention by Ottawa under the pretext of protecting federally guaranteed minority rights. Emphasis on the preservation of the French language and culture has alienated support from Québec's Anglophone and allophone minorities for the *projet souverainiste*. These groups characteristically see considerable risk in sovereignty for Québec because *Québécois* nationalism, based primarily on the French dimension of the province, has little to offer other minorities.<sup>198</sup>

Prior to the 1995 referendum, only 8.7% of Québec's Anglophones and probably never more than 10% of allophones favoured sovereignty. Indeed, "So pronounced is the

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<sup>196</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 12-6.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-9.

<sup>198</sup> Schmitt, "Ethnic Structure..." 4.

lack of support for sovereignty among Québec's minorities that they can be together considered as a relatively cohesive counter group to Québec's francophones.”<sup>199</sup> Those populations that would not want to stay a part of Québec, including, primarily, Anglophones, allophones and First Nations peoples, would potentially disobey the new authorities and plead for protection of their federal rights.<sup>200</sup> A violent reflex could conceivably be tied to issues surrounding the rights of these minorities within Québec to secede and the requirement for any separatist government to present a qualified referendum majority representing more than “50% +1.”<sup>201</sup>

In the event of separation, would stranded communities, loyal to Canada be able to call upon the Federal government for protection? Communities in Western QC have already expressed the intent to do so.<sup>202</sup> “While it is difficult to envision tensions ... escalating to widespread violence, sporadic unrest in the form of Aboriginal, Anglophone, allophone and federalist francophone discontent is a distinct possibility.”<sup>203</sup> The fundamental risk of violence comes not from the remote risk of Canadians from outside of Québec resorting to force of arms to keep Québec in the confederation, but from the much more probable prospect of civil disorder within Québec, and consequent appeals to the federal government of Canada.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 4.

<sup>200</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 105.

<sup>201</sup> Dion, “The Dynamic of Secessions...,” 537.

<sup>202</sup> Astroff, “Make Up...,” 13-4.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>204</sup> Gibbins, “Three Scenarios...,” 14.

## THE FIRST NATIONS QUESTION

Exacerbating the question of potential territorial conflict in the event of Québec's secession, aboriginal communities, already stoked by land disputes over hydro-electric projects and the legacy of the 1990 'Oka Crisis', do not support Québec sovereignty and would resist inclusion of their homelands in any independent Québec. As native leaders have enunciated, "... if the province of Québec declares or negotiates separation from the rest of Canada, it can not include at least two thirds of the province over which [First Nations] people claim title and jurisdiction."<sup>205</sup> Québec's First Nations communities voted 90% against sovereignty in the 1995 referendum, with even francophone First Nations communities voting no more than 25 percent "*Oui.*"<sup>206</sup> If required, First Nations leaders fully expect Ottawa to intervene to protect their federally protected land claims and resources.<sup>207</sup> For an independent Québec, the resurgence of First Nations activism could lead to armed confrontation and terrorism under the guise of protecting perceived territorial or national rights in the face of an intransigent government.<sup>208</sup>

## BORDER ISSUES AND BOUNDARY DISPUTES

Despite a starting assumption of the inviolability of Québec's current provincial borders, practical points of territorial contention would rapidly come to the fore. As detailed previously, stranded ethnic minority communities loyal to Ottawa would be expected to call upon the Canadian federal government for protection. The lack of

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<sup>205</sup> Ovide Mercredi, National Chief of the AFN, in an address to the AFN constitutional panel, Calgary Herald, October 22, 1991, p. A3 quoted in Gibbins, "Three Scenarios...", 14.

<sup>206</sup> Schmitt, "Ethnic Structure...", 4.

<sup>207</sup> Astroff, "Make Up...", 12-3.

<sup>208</sup> Ross and Gurr, "Why Terrorism Subsides...", 423.

historical legal precedent in dealing with post-secession dispute resolution processes, promises to facilitate contention, friction and, potentially, violence. The ‘extra-legal’ determination of boundary issues related to large tracts of northern Québec, added to the province in 1898 and 1912 by the federal government and mostly inhabited by the Cree and Inuit First Nations, stand out as a prime example of potentially explosive post-secession issue.<sup>209</sup>

Moreover, having split the rest of Canada into non-contiguous Western and Maritime regions, an independent Québec would automatically become an *international* security competitor for Ottawa, thus complicating and exacerbating tensions.<sup>210</sup> Specifically, the requirement to re-draw the boundaries for waterways in the Cabot Strait (from internal water to international shipping lane), while overhauling and enforcing shipping regulations, environmental controls and rights of access would be potentially acrimonious.

Atlantic Canada, would have differing interests than those of the rest of Canada. Complex issues such as the overall management of maritime resources, and the disposition of Hudson’s Bay, the Strait of Belle Isle, the Hudson Strait and the renegotiation of the Saint Lawrence Lawrence Seaway Agreement would require attention.<sup>211</sup> The Maritime provinces stakes in the delimitation of boundaries encompassing the Gulf Fisheries and potentially lucrative energy resource basins would

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<sup>209</sup> Desmond Morton, “The Canadian Security Dimension,” In *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 69-75 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 72-3.

<sup>210</sup> Haydon, “General Security Analysis...,” 34.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

also be very high.<sup>212</sup> Especially in the context of Québec's unresolved boundary dispute with Labrador and Newfoundland, territorial disputes regarding access to the waterways and resources of the Gulf of St. Lawrence could be expected to be contentious and vulnerable to tactical manipulation in a period of perceived transitional weakness. Moreover, the degree of interdependence amongst eastern oriented traders, from central Canadian great lakes ports through the Saint Lawrence River seaway, would make any attempt by Québec to impose complete economic separation almost inconceivable and fraught with risks of conflict.<sup>213</sup>

#### **DIVIDING DEBT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Given the fundamental importance of softening the adverse economic impact of a Québec declaration of independence, the rapid division of the Canadian national debt and property, never easy in any 'divorce', would be critical. Possible sources of tension in the case of separation include the question of federal and military infrastructure while, as underlined above, the rest of Canada's revitalization would require the maintenance of extensive transportation links between central and Atlantic Canada, potentially implying tough territorial restraints on Québec.<sup>214</sup> The smooth undertaking of debt division negotiations would be contingent on the perceived equity of the distribution of federal assets (including military), future intentions, and the territorial integrity of wealth-producing regions in Québec.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 31.

<sup>213</sup> Haydon, "General Security Analysis...", 36.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>215</sup> Rowlands, "International Aspects...", 46-7.

Consequently, there are strong reasons to conclude that Québec would undertake to assume its share of the Canadian national debt as a matter of course. While assumption of debt would be a way for an independent Québec to assert independence and acquire immediate credibility in international financial markets, any attempt to repudiate its contentious ‘fair share’ of the national debt is seen as unlikely on historical grounds (i.e., it has never been done successfully).<sup>216</sup> Indeed, the concept of sovereignty association under the *projet souverainiste* explicitly includes the assumption of Québec’s fair share of the national Canadian debt, as well as monetary union.<sup>217</sup> It is unrealistic, however, to expect that the enormous infrastructural, materiel (including military), real estate and financial division issues, would not cause tension.<sup>218</sup> Assuming the potentially contentious issue of debt division between an independent Québec City and Ottawa could be quickly and equitably resolved, Québec would be saddled with a new national debt amounting to somewhere between 95% and 140% of gross domestic product, potentially saddling the new country with the almost impossible burden of being one of the most heavily indebted jurisdictions in the world.<sup>219</sup> Although a newly independent Québec, in order to avoid the imposition of trade penalties and universal condemnation, would be under considerable investor and international market pressure to address the debt issue,

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<sup>216</sup> Rowlands, “International Aspects...,” 42.

<sup>217</sup> Parizeau, “The Case...,” 74.

<sup>218</sup> Morton, “The Canadian Security Dimension,” 73.

<sup>219</sup> See Patrick Grady, “The Financial and Economic Dimension,” In *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 117-126 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 123-4 and Dion, “The Dynamic of Secessions...,” 547. Estimates on debt-servicing ratios vary widely. The figures quoted assume that an independent Québec’s share of the Canadian national debt would be determined by proportion of population or up to 25%.

differences in calculating the share of debt (based on either population or GDP) leave considerable, not easily resolvable substance for negotiation.<sup>220</sup>

### **INDEPENDENT QUÉBEC AS A FAILED STATE**

Ultimately, the internal challenges facing an independent Québec would be significant, with considerable risk of civil conflict and state failure as a result of economic and social pressures. Opinion polling prior to the 1995 referendum on sovereignty suggested that *Québécois* were ready to face those challenges<sup>221</sup> especially if some form of economic union or association with the rest of Canada could be maintained in a post-independence Québec.<sup>222</sup> The desire to maintain an economic association is driven by fear of economic uncertainty and the need to protect \$60 billion in trade and up to 500,000 *Québécois* jobs that might be at risk if Québec found itself excluded from regional trade agreements or monetary union with Canada.<sup>223</sup> Even under the most ideal circumstances, an independent Québec would face severe short term economic challenges. Factors that would impact Québec immediately include a discontinuation of federal fund transfers, unforecast public deficits (requiring tax increases and public spending cuts), an increase in international borrowing costs, a drop in international direct investment, a large non-francophone population outflow, a discontinuation of subsidies to

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<sup>220</sup> See Rowlands, “International Aspects...,” 43-5. Using GDP as the measure by which debt repayment would be decided, the amount of debt assigned to Québec, once adjusted for post-separation after effects, would be in the area of 20% - 22% of the Canadian national debt. The methodology used in the 1991 Bélanger-Campeau Commission’s assignment of debt share (at 16.6%), however, seems overly complex and biased in favour of Québec.

<sup>221</sup> Dion, “The Dynamic of Secessions...,” 550.

<sup>222</sup> See Simeon, “Limits to Partnership...,” 21. *Québécois* opinion polling registered 72% in favour of sovereignty with some form of economic association with the rest of Canada while 95% were in favour of continued economic ties including a common currency, free trade and common central bank.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-5.

local agricultural and textile industries, and the erection, by a resentful Ottawa, of potentially devastating trade barriers.<sup>224</sup>

Consequently, Québec's accession to sovereignty would create impossible tensions. Despite the desire and necessity for a quick and efficient resolution of outstanding issues, negotiations between Ottawa and an independent Québec City promise to be long and incoherent. The Canadian federal government could not be ousted from Québec territory without a clear referendum mandate. Minority and First Nations rights issues promise to be explosive and the 'divorce', itself, would create an almost inextricable legal and bureaucratic mess.<sup>225</sup> The potential for violence internal to an independent Québec on the verge of collapse would be considerable and "...has less to do with the populations' dispositions before the referendum, than with the new situation created by the 'Yes' vote."<sup>226</sup>

As socioeconomic realities diverge from nationalist aspirations and the potential of the state to meet those expectations decreases, tendencies towards violence will increase.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, the prospect of divergent social visions within the separatist movement giving way to extremely contentious competing agendas in a newly

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<sup>224</sup> See Vaillancourt, "The Economics..." 8-9, Dion, "The Dynamic of Secessions..." 536 and Grady, "The Financial and Economic Dimension..." 121. Analyses of the potential costs of independence to Québec include:

- a 5-15% drop in gross domestic product (GDP);
- up to a 1.5% drop in per capita GDP;
- an increase in the collective tax burden by \$2 – \$4 billion; and
- losses of up to 300,000 workers.

<sup>225</sup> See, Marcel Coté, "Le rêve de la terre promise: les couts de l'indépendance," (Montréal: Stanke, 1995), for an extensive treatment of the subject.

<sup>226</sup> Dion, "The Dynamic of Secessions..." 537.

<sup>227</sup> Laurendau, *Les Québécois Violents*, 195.

independent Québec can not be discounted either.<sup>228</sup> Evidence suggests the best of peaceful intentions and a commitment to democratic values would not be sufficient to satisfy the national impulses of idle, disaffected and unemployed populations or to preempt or prevent outbreaks of violence.<sup>229</sup> Indeed, especially as security forces become over-stretched in response to even routine demands, the advent of armed thugs, vigilantes and paramilitary groups (reminiscent of *FLQ* terrorists or Oka's Mohawk warriors), could be expected even in the absence of complete failure of a newly independent state of Québec.<sup>230</sup>

### **LEADER ELITES AND ETHNIC CONFLICT**

Ethnic conflict is often provoked by leader elites in times of socioeconomic turmoil in order to fend off domestic challengers and advance political agendas. Faced with a failing state apparatus, it is worth speculating the extent to which the *chefs* of a newly independent Québec would harness attendant ethnic divisions to overcome and traverse the chaos of a long sought government on the tenuous verge of collapse. As detailed earlier, anti-sovereignist minorities in Québec have already expressed an adamantly non-conformist orientation. Perhaps separatist leader Jacques Parizeau's "ethnic vote" remarks in the near run aftermath of the defeated 1995 referendum

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<sup>228</sup> See Laurendau, *Les Québécois Violents*, 45 and Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism..." 224. The strongly activist socialist leanings of significant factions of the separatist movement would be expected to conflict with the exigencies of a free market and trading economy in a newly independent Québec.

<sup>229</sup> Holsti, "From Khartoum to Québec..." 153-4.

<sup>230</sup> Anna Simons, "Correspondence: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict." *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring, 2001): 187.

initiative provide some indication<sup>231</sup> as to the extent that mass media could potentially be leveraged in partisan and propagandistic ways to aggravate inter-ethnic tensions towards specific political objectives.<sup>232</sup>

Indeed, a central feature of the Québec nationalist movement is the "...ability of its leaders to mobilize popular support for substantial changes - up to and including political independence – to the constitutional status quo in Canada."<sup>233</sup> One extreme possibility points to newly emergent independent Québec, struggling under significant social and economic strain, conceivably, providing fertile ground for such leader elites searching to consolidate hard, if only narrowly, won political gains by allowing them to mobilize disaffected populations and "hostile masses" in a presumably free speech environment that an independent Québec would offer.<sup>234</sup> Endangered political elites can be expected to harness "...ideas such as ethnicity, religion, culture, and class [because they] ... play a key role as instruments of power and influence, in particular because of their centrality to legitimacy and authority..." as they attempt to sustain their own positions and support domestic political agendas.<sup>235</sup>

Even under the best and benign circumstances, void of all emotional irrationality, strategic inter-ethnic group dilemmas can produce violent conflict especially when

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<sup>231</sup> Jacques Parizeau, *Discours de Jacques Parizeau le soir du 30 octobre 1995, après la défaite* [text on-line]; available from <http://www.vigile.net/ds-souv/docs2/95-10-30-discours-parizeau.html>; Internet; accessed 10 March, 2007.

<sup>232</sup> See Brown, "The Causes of Internal Conflict..." 9-10. Brown draws upon the examples of ethnic group leaders during the Balkan civil wars of the 1990s to support his theoretical treatment of this subject.

<sup>233</sup> Meadwell, "The Politics of Nationalism..." 204.

<sup>234</sup> Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War..." 109.

<sup>235</sup> V.P. Gagnon, Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and the International Conflict: The Case of Serbia." *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994-1995): 132-135.

agenda-driven political entrepreneurs and elites, who “stimulate ethnic fears for their own aggrandizement,” attempt to harness political memories, myths and emotions to pursue selfish end states, thus accelerating a vicious cycle of ethnic fear and violence.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, as discussed in previous sections, the notion of ethnic-based conflict is not absolutely foreign to Canada or Québec, nor are the armed groups, like the *FLQ* or Oka’s Mohawk warriors, that would, potentially, prosecute such violence. Under similar conditions, where the economy is failing, belligerent ethnically distinct minorities are militating for partition, security forces are practically non-existent, political schism is systemic and newly attained independence is teetering on the verge of collapse, “...it is entirely possible to imagine Bosnian-like chaos in [otherwise] prosperous Québec.”<sup>237</sup>

## **PROBABLE US REACTIONS**

Due to continental economic and security interdependence, US responses to a Québec declaration of independence, would be critical to both Québec and Ottawa. US interests would change drastically, with the ultimate goal being a maintenance of the economic viability and political stability of the region. Indeed, contentious negotiations on any number of social, political or economic files leading to prolonged instability north of the US border would necessarily draw attention from Washington.<sup>238</sup> Concerns over the impact on bilateral or multilateral security arrangements are inconclusive except to

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<sup>236</sup> Lake and Rothchild, “Containing Fear...,” 53.

<sup>237</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” 68.

<sup>238</sup> Gibbins, “Three Scenarios...,” 12.

state the obvious requirement to probably renegotiate the status of an independent Québec.<sup>239</sup>

At the risk of disrupting its own economic stability and physical security, Ottawa would be under significant pressure from Washington to quickly facilitate an independent Québec's participation in extant bilateral accords such as the 1965 Automotive Agreement, the NAFTA, and the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) while not impeding its adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. In practical terms, there are no obvious obstacles to the US seeking and accepting Québec's admission into continental security and economic arrangements as soon as practically feasible.<sup>240</sup> . "The effective assimilation of Québec into these structures would be critical to maintaining the benefits the United States currently enjoys from its relationship with Canada."<sup>241</sup>

According to US State Department reports,

... Québec does meet generally accepted criteria for national self-determination in the sense of ethnic distinctiveness in a clearly defined geographic area with an existing separate legal and governmental system. There is also no question regarding the basic long-term viability of an independent Québec in the economic sense or in regards to its ability to be a responsible member of the family of nations.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Astroff, "Make Up...", 16.

<sup>240</sup> Louis Balthazar, "Consensus and Ambiguities: Relations Between a Sovereign Québec and the United States," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 135-142; [article on-line]; available from <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?action=print&docId=5002263597>; Internet; accessed 16 March, 2007.

<sup>241</sup> Peter Morici, "A Sovereign Québec and U.S. National Interests," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter, 1997) [article on-line]; available from <http://www.smith.umd.edu/faculty/pmorici/A%20Sovereign%20Québec%20and%20U.S.doc>; Internet; accessed 16 March, 2007, 1-2.

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Parizeau, "The Case for a Sovereign Québec," 75.

Accordingly, and most importantly, due to the fact that any decision to abrogate the North American economic relationship policy structure would be detrimental to US economic interests, the US would most likely enter into a free trade agreement with an independent Québec and pursue close relations as quickly as possible.<sup>243</sup>

## **THE THREAT OF EXTERNAL INTERVENTION**

Although the recourse to armed force by Ottawa to prevent a unilateral declaration of Québec independence is inconceivable, some form of external intervention on an independent Québec's territory, to either secure federal assets or to respond to federally-protected minority populations, could take any number of forms. Although France's policy of "non-intervention but non-indifference," for example, has been a constant irritant to Ottawa,<sup>244</sup> the single most important external actor in any Québec separation scenario is the United States. The most probable grounds for external intervention would range from coercive to non-coercive intervention and third party mediation in response to minority protection issues, humanitarian assistance needs, resource protection, stability concerns, or, simply, to pre-empt the implication of other actors external to Québec.<sup>245</sup> Indeed, analyses of contemporary civil conflicts underscore

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<sup>243</sup> Joseph Jockel, "The USA Reaction," in *Divided We Fall: The National Security Implications of Canadian Constitutional Issues*, ed. Alex Morrison, 141-147 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1992), 143.

<sup>244</sup> Smiley, "The Canadian Federation..." 211.

<sup>245</sup> See Lake and Rothchild, "Containing Fear..." 64-5 and Stedman, *International Actor...*, 6-7. Given a breakdown or collapse in conventional constructs governing group interaction (e.g., the separation of a territory from its former state framework), ethnic civil conflicts tend to precipitate intense interest on the part of external actors, leading to various forms of intervention.

the likelihood of foreign interveners or patrons facilitating impulses to ethnic war by providing the means to conflict in terms of materiel or financial support.<sup>246</sup>

Given Washington's hyper-sensitivity to any situation that might precipitate a security vacuum or instability within close proximity to the US, it would be illogical and a global anomaly if the US did not intervene in some manner during Québec's transition from Canadian province to independent state.<sup>247</sup>

Although it might be resented and resisted through diplomacy, there is little doubt that the United States would intervene if it felt, correctly or not, that instability on its northern border threatened its own security. Such intervention would also occur if political pressures from within the American government or from interest groups or a national press newly interested in Canada were to compel involvement. Whatever the ethical questions surrounding the issue of intervention, the reality is that the United States will maintain a cold and hard eye on the evolving situation.<sup>248</sup>

Given the level of interdependent complexity of the North American economic and security space, the US inclination to minimize disruptions during Québec's potentially long transition to full independent statehood would lead it to necessarily insist on unfettered access to Canadian airspace, territory and waters to replace, if necessary, an otherwise neutralized or incapable Canadian Forces.<sup>249</sup> United States intervention could, potentially, take the form of direct military intervention in response to perceived security threats, the imposition of sanctions or, more likely, the provision of some form of humanitarian or military aid.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War...", 110.

<sup>247</sup> Morton, "The Canadian Security Dimension," 72.

<sup>248</sup> Schmitt, "Ethnic Structure...", 13.

<sup>249</sup> Jockel, "The USA Reaction," 145.

## THE ROLE OF MILITARY FORCES AND THE RISK OF CONFRONTATION

Accordingly, an independent Québec will require robust security forces, if for no other reason, to pre-empt external Canadian or US intervention in response to destabilizing internal security challenges.<sup>251</sup> Nonetheless, in case of separation and Québec independence, or in anticipation of it, it should be expected that Ottawa would undertake to remove all major mobile military and federal government assets including aircraft and ships (as well as Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Coast Guard vessels) from Québec territory. Ottawa's concerns would, conceivably, be contingent on negotiations over the division of debt, prior claims to any and all equipment due to NATO and NORAD commitments and a desire to not leave an independent Québec with any asset that could be used against the rest of Canada in the case of serious conflict.<sup>252</sup>

The most contentious issue of all, however, may well be in deciding the disposition of military personnel serving in Québec, possibly precipitating a split in the Canadian Forces along linguistic lines.<sup>253</sup> Indeed,

It is probable that the separation of Québec from Canada would produce a split in the military, with most francophone officers opting to be a part of Québec...officers and enlisted personnel would feel great pressure to join their homeland's forces, both from the standpoint of personal identity as

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<sup>250</sup> Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions...", 164.

<sup>251</sup> David, Charles and Stéphane Roussel, *Environnement Stratégique et Modèles de Défense: Une Perspective Québécoise* (Montréal: Éditions Méridien, 1996), 116.

<sup>252</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 30.

<sup>253</sup> See Astroff, "Make Up...", 14-5. Apparently with a view to creating divisions within military units serving in Québec, Federal *Bloc Québécois* Member of Parliament Jean-Marc Jacob was noted to have distributed a letter to francophone Canadian Forces personnel urging them to transfer their allegiance to Québec in the event of a 'Yes' vote during the 1995 referendum.

well as the positive pressures of family ties and the negative pressures of an unfriendly anglophone community.<sup>254</sup>

For a newly independent Québec, questions of defence and security will be issues of significant importance as the risks of disarmament, the unlikelihood of alliance with the Canadian Forces and potential internal security threats become apparent.<sup>255</sup>

Although, the use of military force can and has been robustly supported by *Québécois* if the reasons are considered valid and conform to their own needs,<sup>256</sup> significant challenges exist in creating a credible collective security force in an independent Québec. For reasons highlighted earlier, any newly formed security force is likely to face enormous organizational challenges, a potentially exaggerated demand for security deployments, severe resource limitations, and a decision-making construct that will require rapid, decisive action. Moreover, geographical challenges would impose an expensive multi-service framework, to include naval and air forces, on any force configuration, most likely resulting in a heavy emphasis on lightly armed auxiliary and paramilitary security forces for the conduct of land operations.<sup>257</sup> While attempting to pursue meaningful participation in collective security alliances, priority efforts for a nascent Québec security force would most likely be constrained to aiding civil powers, humanitarian assistance missions, search and rescue and peacekeeping-type missions.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Coulombe, “Québec in the Federation,” 188.

<sup>255</sup> Castonguay, *Questions...*, 3.

<sup>256</sup> Courchene, “The Changing Nature...,” 25.

<sup>257</sup> See David and Roussel, *Environnement Stratégique...*, 131 and Yves Bélanger, Charles-Philippe David and Stéphane Roussel, “La défense d’un Québec souverain – Quatre scénarios possibles,” *Le Devoir*, 18 October, 1995 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.vigile.net/armee/etudes.html>; Internet; accessed 15 March, 2007. The authors of these contemporary analyses underline the relatively prohibitive costs of a multi-service Québec armed forces while recognizing that even the maintenance of a smaller force structure would require significant reorganization for, potentially, reduced capability.

Effectively, even if Québec is able to retain a share of the Canadian Forces proportional to that which is now found in the province of Québec, it would retain much less flexibility in responding to even temporary low intensity emergencies such as the 1990 ‘Oka Crisis.’<sup>259</sup>

In the event of the necessarily emotional “Yes” vote in a future referendum on Québec sovereignty, it can be expected to see demonstrations, and counter-demonstrations by stake holding groups which will require a state security force response. Initial forms of escalating resistance and conflict leading to violence may include civil disobedience (e.g., refusal to observe local laws, pay taxes or the occupation of public buildings), low level terrorist activity (along the lines of *FLQ* tactics), and the emergence of paramilitary groups (with organizational capacities not dissimilar to those possessed by narco-criminal biker gangs).<sup>260</sup> Far from beginning as large scale clashes of one ethnic group against another, destabilizing violence is likely to be localized, relatively compact, non-military in nature and involving a small number of highly motivated groups purporting to act in the name of a vital cause,<sup>261</sup> potentially precipitating “...long-term, low-intensity guerrilla and communal warfare... .”<sup>262</sup>

Apart from, perhaps, some Canadian federal military deployments to address complications arising from the anti-sovereignist preferences of some Québec minorities,

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<sup>258</sup> Castonguay, *Questions Relatives...*, 6-7.

<sup>259</sup> Grady, “The Financial and Economic Dimension,” 123.

<sup>260</sup> See Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 7-8. The example of Northern Ireland, where extremely small groups of ethnically-similar radical paramilitaries operating in a geographically-confined liberal democratic space, in the face of massive security and intelligence force deployments have managed to control the political agenda for decades does not auger well for an independent Québec.

<sup>261</sup> Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’,” 63.

<sup>262</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 5.

deliberate military confrontation in the event of separation has typically been rejected as a possibility.<sup>263</sup> However, the thought of unintentional conflict between eventually reconstituted military forces is not wholly inconceivable. Indeed,

“It can be anticipated that both the governments of Québec and Canada will have carefully thought out contingency plans for controlling key military, security and other assets.”<sup>264</sup>

Policies and actions designed to minimize disorder and impose some certainty and predictability would be essential.<sup>265</sup> The organizational strain of a predictably high incidence of civil disorder on a rapidly and imperfectly expanded Québec security force, swollen by ‘partisan enthusiasts,’ would be enormous. Confrontation with Canadian Forces deployed under federal law requiring the protection of installations, equipment and, potentially, minority populations would be inevitable. Miscalculation or misjudgement in pursuit of rapid solutions to perceived issues, over-enthusiasm driven by emotion, or public pressure for intervention and retaliation would be ever present dangers. To be sure, “...the use of [rapidly recruited] semi-trained troops in situations of deadly tension presents the greatest single risk of that ‘descent in to the abyss’ which [Canada and Québec] faces.”<sup>266</sup> A single misstep in the face of hostile demonstrators or unexpected resistance could rapidly degenerate into armed conflict. Indeed, “...nothing can turn good citizens against the government more quickly than military forces that overreact.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Stairs, *Canada and Québec...*, 27.

<sup>264</sup> Schmitt, “Ethnic Structure...,” 8.

<sup>265</sup> Cairns, “Looking into the Abyss...,” 217.

<sup>266</sup> Morton, “The Canadian Security Dimension,” 74.

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<sup>267</sup> Piromalli, *Canada's Domestic Security...*, 93.

## V. WEATHERING THE STORM?: CONCLUSION

By virtue of its persistence, logical certainty and potentially catastrophic consequences, no other single issue can be said to pose as great a threat to the Canadian confederation as the prospect of Québec sovereignty. To be sure, the relative threat level surges and recedes depending on the ‘seasonal’ correlation of factors that set the conditions for the ‘perfect storm’ of separation. But, the elements that contribute to those seasonal change are, nonetheless, forever present. Twice before, in 1980 and 1995, Canada experienced an increasingly severe convergence of systems that buffeted the confederation and tested the integrity and stability of the federal ship of state through popular referenda on sovereignty in Québec. The inexorable logic of the sovereigntist impulse dictates that future referenda are probable and that Québec separation is, consequently, a distinct possibility if not, ultimately, unavoidable.

The socioeconomic pressures of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sparked the *Québécois* civic nationalist impulse over the course of *la Révolution Tranquille* and set the conditions for Ottawa’s perpetual preoccupation with Québec’s place in confederation. Although Ottawa has attempted to dispel separatist inclinations in Québec through various forms of asymmetric federalism, the fundamental *Québécois* grievances of alienation and marginalization remain extant. Indeed, Québec’s growing economic strength and financial independence have significantly reduced the last major obstacle to a potential sovereignty referendum victory. Whereas the popular *Québécois* desire for sovereignty in past referenda faltered for want of economic security guarantees and ‘sovereignty association’ with the rest of Canada, the rise of the Québec’s financial independence in a globalized market space has obviated that need. Although the Québec

sovereignty movement is, for the moment, hamstrung by a lack of organizational leadership, once another charismatic leader in the mould of a René Levesque or Lucien Bouchard emerges to harness the separatist forces of popular frustration and newfound confidence, the stage will be set for Québec's transition to eventual sovereignty and independence. In effect, the perfect storm will have formed.

Although the challenges of independence are predictable, the various issues involved in the messy divorce from Ottawa are likely to push a newly independent Québec to the verge of instability and collapse. Ultimately, it is illogical to expect that the economic necessity for the rapid reconciliation of outstanding issues regarding debt, infrastructure, minority rights, First Nations issues and territory can be scrupulously achieved to the satisfaction of all parties without the eruption of escalatory friction and violence. The critically distinct requirements for speed and comprehensiveness in the area of dispute resolution are inherently antithetical. Especially within an already under-resourced security environment as Canadian military, security and law enforcement agencies currently find themselves, the very real danger of even localized, low level violence spiralling out of control is manifest. As underlined in the previous chapters, Canadian history, as well as exhaustive analyses of contemporary ethnic conflict, offers demonstrable reasons to believe that Québec's transition to independence will be everything but peaceful. Indeed, from the 1837 "Papineau Rebellion" to the 1990 "Oka Crisis", Canadian history, and specifically that of Québec, is replete with examples of formed groups of armed malcontents squaring off against state-controlled security forces as a means of expressing grievances or defending perceived collective interests.

The prospect of Québec separation has dominated the national Canadian stage and federal political arena for a generation. Québec's 1995 referendum on sovereignty, with national disintegration coming, as it did, within fractions of a percentage point of becoming reality, was a stark reminder to the rest of Canada, that secession was a tangible possibility. By enshrining the principles of power-sharing, enhanced regional autonomy, joint exercise of central government and the provision of minority veto powers on issues vital to Québec, Ottawa's current initiatives aimed at accommodating Québec under the rubric of decentralization and asymmetric federalism are in the best cross-ethnic state building traditions.<sup>268</sup> They are, however, at best, stopgap measures for history and collective human nature demonstrate that perpetual "... voluntaristic ... cooperation to avoid ethnic strife..." are contrary to collective human nature.<sup>269</sup> Ultimately, the implications for the long-term peaceable survival of the Canadian federal state are not encouraging.

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<sup>268</sup> See Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions...", 151 and, Lake and Rothchild, "Containing Fear...", 57.

<sup>269</sup> Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions...", 156.

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