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***Supreme Command – A Canadian Possibility?***

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## Abstract

This paper critically examines prime minister Pierre Trudeau's leadership during the October Crisis of 1970. The paper posits that, in a unique Canadian context, Pierre Trudeau established himself as a war statesman, congruent with associated defining qualities described by Eliot Cohen in his book *Supreme Command*. Given Pierre Trudeau's decided lack of emphasis on defence matters, his consideration as a war statesman would, at first, appear counterintuitive. Indeed, Trudeau paid little attention to defence policy or the selection of the country's top generals. Furthermore, there is little evidence to support Trudeau's candidacy as a war statesman, from Cohen's thesis perspective, of a politician vigorously challenging and engaging military leaders in detailed ways and means discussions. However, in considering his performance in relation to Cohen's war-statesman qualities of determination, mastery of communication, moderation and courage, Trudeau emerges as a resolute, ruthless, rallying and courageous leader. Guided by an unwavering commitment to unity as a national vital interest, Trudeau rose above his personal civil libertarian convictions and took the extraordinary step of invoking the War Measures Act to quell the state of 'apprehended insurrection'. In so doing he captured the strategic initiative from le Front de Libération du Québec, reassured a shaken country, and restored democratic legitimacy. Canada has Pierre Trudeau to thank for the fact that in over thirty five years since the October Crisis, terrorism has effectively ceased to overtly exist in Canada, and separatist expression has been confined to the democratic arena. Pierre Trudeau merits credit for preserving the national federation and deserves recognition as a war statesman in a unique Canadian context.

## Supreme Command – A Canadian Possibility?

*It is Canada's Sept 11: a day that changed a whole set of assumptions about security, intelligence, privacy, and the nature of political life in Canada*

- Graham Fraser... referring to 5 October 1970<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Few prime ministers have been capable of evoking a more immediate response from Canadians than the charismatic and enigmatic Pierre Elliott Trudeau. During almost sixteen years in office he at once captured the imagination of many, dashed the hopes of others, and confused the rest - a legacy that has yet to dim with the passing of time or the man. With the exception of the 1982 patriation of the constitution, there is arguably no more defining or enduring moment of his tenure than the October Crisis which gripped the nation in 1970. It was during this time that the safety of the “fireproof house, far from flammable materials”<sup>2</sup> proclaimed by Senator Raoul Dandurand in 1924 at the League of Nations appeared threatened as some of the house's residents played with matches.

In the years since Dandurand's isolationist statement, Canada had entered World War II of its own accord, and Canadians had made significant contributions and gallant sacrifices during the war effort. Although German submarines threatened the eastern

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Fraser, “October Crisis still a black hole in our history,” *Toronto Star*, 10 May 2003, 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo's Concise Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976), 114.

seaboard and operated in the Gulf of St Lawrence, for Canadians, this war, similar to World War I, was fought almost exclusively overseas against a largely invisible enemy. In the decades following World War II, and in the absence of a direct, credible, and external threat to the nation, the Canadian military establishment was successively and systematically neglected by a series of prime ministers. Irrespective of their political affiliation, they promoted Canadian security interests and sought to preserve the nation's middle power status via a reliance on multilateral decision making institutions embodied by the Commonwealth, la Francophonie and the United Nations; 'soft power' projection; peacekeeping as "the only political justification for Canada's armed forces"<sup>3</sup>; and treaty based security represented by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) agreements. A once proud and robust military establishment was allowed to erode to a shadow of its former self. No-one was arguably more responsible for this decline than Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

Despite the fact that Canadian defence spending<sup>4</sup> was a paltry 0.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) prior to World War II, Canada responded in a big way to the Allied war effort. For example, the country put over two million people into uniform during World War II, and emerged from the war with the world's third largest navy. The Canadian war effort, both in terms of industrial and military force mobilization was truly impressive, and at the height of the war defence spending approached 38% of GDP. Immediately after the war this level of effort and attention dropped precipitously to 2% of GDP. Although spending increased to 7.5% of GDP in response to the Korean War, it

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<sup>3</sup> John Pepall, "On guard: Downhill all the way: What killed the military? Years of refusing to take ourselves seriously as a country" *The Ottawa Citizen*, 16 March 1997, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

returned to a consistent 2% of GDP on in the years following the conflict<sup>5</sup>. In Canada, the worldwide search for a swords-to-ploughshares dividend as the Cold War thawed was translated into further defence spending reductions.

In 1967-68, at the end of Lester Pearson's tenure as Prime Minister, defence spending consumed 18 percent of the federal budget. Four years later, in a development that was indicative of Trudeau's isolationist penchant for, "armed forces that stayed at home to preserve domestic tranquility and order",<sup>6</sup> defence spending had fallen to 13 percent of the federal budget. This lack of defence focus was consistent with a general liberalism philosophy that advocated a military for self-defence only. Trudeau's general disregard for the military, which had crystallized in his twenties during his brief service in the Canadian Officer Training Corps, was entirely in keeping with the prevailing anti-war sentiment in Quebec, and the historically less than proportional representation of the Québécois in the two great wars.

Although Trudeau's isolationist predilection was hardly new, he took defence matters and defence policy formulation to new lows. When queried by Peter Newman on how he rated national defence from a priority perspective Trudeau replied, "Oh, about 14<sup>th</sup>, just behind pig subsidies".<sup>7</sup> As Jack Granatstein has observed in reflecting upon Trudeau's regard for the military, "The generals and their soldiers were dolts, frittering away their time and the government's money. The military was simply too expensive to

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed the Canadian Military* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2004), 120.

<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Newman, "Peaceable No Longer," *Maclean's Magazine*, March 20, 2006, 24.

maintain, unnecessary for a nation as safe from attack – in his eyes – as Canada.”<sup>8</sup> In his book, *Who Killed the Canadian Military*, Granatstein makes a cogent argument that ultimately, in not demanding more from their political leaders, the Canadian people permitted a minimalist military agenda to be advanced and are, therefore, responsible for allowing the military to wither on the vine. This notwithstanding, in reviewing the defence focus of post-World War II prime ministers, Granatstein saves his most scathing comments for Pierre Trudeau, “Over sixteen years in power, he succeeded in making the Canadian Forces as weak and irrelevant as he left Canadian foreign policy. Without a doubt, Pierre Trudeau killed the Canadian Forces.”<sup>9</sup>

Against this landscape, it is initially counterintuitive to imagine any Canadian Prime Minister, and least of all Pierre Trudeau, as a war statesman. First of all, as the contemporary Canadian psyche continues to altruistically delude itself into thinking that peacekeeping is a non-violent activity, Canadians find it difficult to consider themselves as being anything approaching war-like. Furthermore, many would find it implausible that the left-leaning philosopher king, Pierre Trudeau, could merit consideration as a war statesman. At first blush, Mackenzie King’s efforts as Canada’s war administrator during World War II, and his decision to have Canada enter the war as an independent nation, and not as a pawn of Great Britain, might lend some credence to consideration of him as a Canadian war statesman. However, this paper will argue that in responding to the October Crisis in 1970, Pierre Trudeau acted as a war statesman, in a unique Canadian

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed the Canadian Military* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 2004), 116.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

context, consistent with common qualities shared by the great war statesmen analyzed by Eliot Cohen in his book *Supreme Command*. The paper will review Cohen's war statesman thesis, Trudeau's political and philosophical foundation and explore the political climate in Quebec leading up to the October Crisis prior to examining the Prime Minister's leadership during the crisis through the lens of *Supreme Command*. Finally, the relative success and long term effects of his performance will be reviewed.

### **Supreme Command**

*War is too important to be left to the generals.*

*- Georges Clemenceau*

In building upon Clemenceau's well used citation, Eliot Cohen, in his stimulating book *Supreme Command*, analyses the leadership of four great democratic war statesmen, Abraham Lincoln, Georges Clemenceau, Winston Churchill and David Ben-Gurion, and challenges the "normal theory of civil-military relations"<sup>10</sup>. The normal theory, that has traditionally dominated civil-military relations thinking, and tends to instinctively resonate favourably with the military professional, may be distilled down to having the polity tell the military what to do, not how to do it. In other words, the warriors of the profession of arms are best suited to decide on ways and means once the civil authority has defined the objective.

In advocating a distinctive line between civilian and military areas of responsibility, Samuel P. Huntington, the well known civil-military theorist, contends

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<sup>10</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 4.



that obliging the profession of arms to defer to civilian control in the conduct of war enhances the risk of military failure. With respect to the traditional view, Peter Fever has noted that, “The normative implication is clear: delegative control, non-intrusive monitoring, gives the military the necessary free hand to translate civilian orders into successful national security (and if necessary, to improve on them so as to achieve it).”<sup>11</sup> Cohen makes a compelling argument that the four statesmen were successful precisely because they did not prescribe to this theory. He rejects the normative implication and, in studying the leadership of the four great statesmen, asserts that, “when politicians abdicate their role in making those decisions, the nation has a problem.”<sup>12</sup>

In examining the leadership of the four leaders, Cohen notes that while none of the four men were military experts or technicians, each was well read in military terms. He states that. “these men understood that they could not lead if they did not know an enormous amount about the business of war.”<sup>13</sup> This understanding allowed them, often to the frustration and resentment of their subordinates, to see the whole picture and query, scrutinize, probe, and challenge military leaders on the ways and means of the conduct of their business. Ultimately, this detailed analysis allowed them to make informed strategic decisions based on a firm appreciation of the issue at hand. Moreover, Cohen argues that in carefully selecting their military leaders, and then prodding, provoking and challenging them, the statesmen elevated the general’s performances to levels they might otherwise not have achieved.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter D. Fever, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 300.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

Cohen hastens to point out that although American politicians delved into, and arguably meddled in, military tactical detail during the Vietnam War, their ultimate failure lay in not engaging their military leaders in a high level debate on the conduct of the war. This point is driven home by Robert McNamara, U.S. Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War, who, in his memoirs states that, “I clearly erred by not forcing...a knock-down, drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam.”<sup>14</sup> The willingness and ability to test a strategy through a detailed review of ways and means is central to the success of the four *Supreme Command* statesmen.

In addition to a well-developed strategic challenge function that war statesmen use to define civil-military relations, Cohen argues that the four leaders shared other notable traits that were key to their success in a war setting.

First among these qualities is obstinacy and unyielding determination<sup>15</sup> and an acceptance that they might not survive the current struggle.<sup>16</sup> All four were experienced, hardened leaders who possessed the resolve and tenacity to face “the single great task of their lives”<sup>17</sup> head on.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

Secondly, in tackling their respective challenges, each statesman displayed a gifted communicative ability that was instrumental in their success. Their ability to connect with, explain and persuade their respective populations on the scope and cause of their campaigns was a rare and exceptional talent. In analysing the speeches and writings of all four statesmen, Cohen concludes that the critical element of persuasiveness “is reflected in the skill of these leaders, who understood that groups and nations - democratic nations above all – are led by the carefully wrought word.”<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, Cohen also argues that all four men were successful due to their quality of moderation.<sup>19</sup> He argues that each had the two moderating qualities: an “ability to discipline his passions”,<sup>20</sup> and “an understanding of when and how to counteract a trend”.<sup>21</sup> An element of moderation that Cohen cites as fundamental to their success was a ruthless “willingness to do terrible things”<sup>22</sup> and a remarkable ability to remain resilient in the face of sure opposition. Lincoln for example, although, “devoted though he was to the Constitution, was more than willing to suppress the right of *habeus corpus*, impose martial law...to stamp out a spirit of defeatism in the Army of the Potomac.”<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Cohen argues each statesman exhibited admirable courage in remaining positive in the face of adversity, a trait that had a direct bearing on the outcome of the war and the psyche of the nation. This courage to persevere in the face of hardship is a

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 220

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 220

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 220

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

quality that Cohen, in comparing it to the statesmen's other common traits, argues that, "Without it, all others would be in vain."<sup>24</sup>

Having briefly reviewed Cohen's arguments relating to civil-military relations and war statesman characteristics, we shall now look at the principal antagonists in the October Crisis, namely Pierre Trudeau and le Front de Libération du Québec.

### **Trudeau the Liberal Democrat**

*La raison avant la passion.*

*- Pierre Trudeau's personal maxim*

To understand and appreciate Trudeau's motivation during the October Crisis one must have a basic understanding of the man and his politics. His personal maxim is a reflection of his adherence to the rationalist movement which is generally understood to favour reason and empirical analysis over emotion and faith.

Pierre Trudeau entered politics the product of an English mother and a French father, and the beneficiary of a Jesuit education predicated on the doctrine of optimism. In his formative post-secondary years he was schooled in and identified with liberalism, and later on was introduced to the theories of federalism. He embraced liberalism and identified with the traditional perspective that considers liberty to be the primary political value, and one that emphasizes the sovereignty of the individual. In more concrete terms, he endorsed the liberal view that advocates freedom of expression, inclusive of freedom

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

of the press, pluralistic democracy, individual liberties, religious tolerance, transparency in government, limited government and the rule of law.

In this vein his career-long quest for a 'just society', the establishment of an Official Languages Act and a constitutionally enshrined Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is totally in keeping with liberal philosophy. As federal Minister of Justice he was the architect of liberal amendments to the Criminal Code relating to abortion and homosexuality, and his policy of multiculturalism and bilingualism are further steps to promote individual freedom. Extending liberalism to government holds that the fundamental responsibility of government is to protect the equal liberty of all. Trudeau endorsed this tenet and considered that a strain of federalism, predicated on a strong constitutional framework which promoted pluralistic democracy and defined areas of provincial jurisdiction, was best suited to accommodate the Canadian cultural, ethnic and regional differences while preserving individual rights. It was with this philosophical foundation that Pierre Trudeau entered politics.

## National Unity as a Vital National Interest

*Canada has no cultural unity, no linguistic unity, no religious unity, no economic unity, no geographic unity. All it has is unity.*

- *Kenneth Boulding*  
(*University of Michigan professor*)<sup>25</sup>

In addressing the issue of vital national interests, it is helpful to return to theorist Donald Nuechterlein's National Interest Matrix where he laid out four basic interests that could be applied to a state. These interests were: defence of homeland; economic; favourable world order; and promotion of values<sup>26</sup>. In assessing how states might view these interests he described descending levels of intensity, namely, survival issues, vital issues, major issues and peripheral issues. Survival issues are those which might threaten the existence of the state, and vital issues were those which threaten harm to the state if immediate action, including the use of military force is not initiated<sup>27</sup>. Given that relatively few Canadians think about security issues, it is not difficult to conclude that the above concepts do not immediately resonate with a majority of Canadians.

Canada enjoys a unique and enviable place in the world. In contrast to many countries, and although there were distinct cultures and interests that made for constitutional tension in 1867, Canada's birth into nationhood was relatively non-violent. The historical absence of a direct military threat to the state has allowed an internal

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<sup>25</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo's Concise Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976), 220.

<sup>26</sup> Edwin J. Arnold Jr, "The Use of Military Power in the Pursuit of National Interests" *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly*, (Spring 1994): 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

climate to develop where defence and security matters do not hold centre stage.

Although it must be admitted that the white European settlers did subscribe to an imperialistic approach in relation to native inhabitants of North America, in its brief time as a nation, Canada has no history of an expansionist foreign policy which would naturally engender a robust military to execute the policy and preserve the 'empire'.

Thus, in the classical sense, Canada has few vital national interests for which the use of military force is justified. Furthermore, in consonance with previous prime ministers, Pierre Trudeau was fully prepared to defer on the issue of security, which he viewed primarily as an issue of continental security, to the Americans, who were fully prepared to devote the resources to preserve it. The Canadian public have grown up in this unique environment, and have a limited appreciation for defence and security issues.

Following his ascent to the leadership of the federal Liberal party and subsequent electoral victory in 1968, Pierre Trudeau continued to advance the civic action agenda established by his predecessor Lester Pearson. The four pronged approach to this plan included: strengthening national unity; improving federal provincial relations; devising a more appropriate constitution; and guarding against the wrong kind of American penetration<sup>28</sup>. For Trudeau, a committed federalist, national unity was of primordial importance. In addressing the issue, Trudeau once remarked that, "We must remain whole, and we must remain complete. National unity is the framework to which everything else is knit."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 51.

<sup>29</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1974), 595.

Trudeau's inaugural Speech from the Throne underscored this civic action programme and linked Canadian independence to Canadian foreign policy by advancing that "such a policy would reinforce our national unity".<sup>30</sup> Dan Loomis, the author of *Not Much Glory*, goes on to state that, "Thus the civic action theme of promoting a sense of national identity was given a new twist toward Canadian nationalism, to fight fire with fire and Quebec nationalism with Canadian nationalism."<sup>31</sup> Consistent with his primordial self-defence rationale for the military, Trudeau considered military action to be complimentary to the civic action agenda, albeit as a last resort.

An ardent federalist, Trudeau came to reject Quebec nationalism expressed in separatist terms, and throughout his tenure as Prime Minister represented an impassioned parry to the thrust of Quebec independence. Whereas the séparatistes advocated a 'maitres chez nous' philosophy predicated on self-determination and an independent state defined by an ethnic boundary, Trudeau was prepared to grant social, cultural or ethnic groups nation status in the social sense, without conferring political sovereignty. In his view, the nationalist argument stemmed directly from emotionalism, and was diametrically opposed to his faith in reason, his views on federalism and the attendant preservation of individual rights. There is an argument to be made that his anti-nationalist views had such potentially explosive political impact that the federal Liberal party, long the champion and supporter of Quebec, was obliged to have him run as a parliamentary candidate in an predominately English-speaking riding in Montreal.

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<sup>30</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 91.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 91



In unabashedly exposing his liberalist approach while referring to the corrupt and socially conservative Union Nationale regime of Maurice Duplessis, Trudeau wrote, “A nationalistic government is by nature intolerant, discriminatory and when all is said and done, totalitarian.”<sup>32</sup> It was in the spirit of advancing the liberal notion of limited government that he actively opposed the Duplessis government by advocating true democracy and supporting the purging of the authoritarian administration that was oppressing individual freedoms.

It was this strident liberalist view that ultimately clashed with the actions of le Front de Libération du Québec. In his view, the “break up of Canada would be more than a domestic embarrassment; it would be a crime against humanity”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Trudeau considered the FLQ crisis as a made-in-Canada threat to the nation’s vital interest – national unity.

### **Nous vaincrons**

*Our struggle can only be victorious. You cannot hold  
back an awakening people. Long live free Quebec.*

*- FLQ manifesto<sup>34</sup>*

Le Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), created in 1960 by a thirty three year old economics student by the name of George Shoeters,<sup>35</sup> was born of years of real and

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), p 56.

<sup>33</sup> H.D. Forbes, review of *Trudeau’s Shadow: The Life and legacy of Pierre Elliot Trudeau The essential Trudeau* ed by Andrew Cohen and J.L. Granatstein, Books in Canada, (February 1999): 4.

<sup>34</sup> Sourced from Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 281.

<sup>35</sup> Malcolm Levin and Christine Sylvester, *Crisis in Quebec* (The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1973), p 71.

perceived unequal treatment both within the federation and at the hands of the provincial government. In an effort to rid Quebec of this legacy, and in espousing a Marxist-Leninist ideology, the FLQ sought “the total independence of Quebeckers, united in a free society, purged forever of the clique of voracious sharks, the patronizing ‘big bosses’ and their henchmen who have made Quebec their hunting preserve for ‘cheap labour’ and unscrupulous exploitation.”<sup>36</sup> This goal to liberate the people of Quebec from the alleged oppression was a terrorist-based mantra predicated on forcing the government into imposing such a draconian state that the population would overthrow the democratically elected government in favour of a proletarian run organization.

Although affiliation with the FLQ is now known to have been limited to some fifty hard core members, several hundred supporters and a few thousand loosely associated sympathizers, the full scope of active popular support for the movement was not well appreciated in October 1970. In their march towards liberation, the FLQ had the endorsement of a section of Quebec academics and intelligentsia which lent an aura of credibility to the cause. Jean-Paul Sarte, a leading French intellectual declared in an interview that, “There’s no question of your obtaining socialist independence gradually in Quebec. So it must of course be through violence.”<sup>37</sup> This sort of endorsement had the effect that in some circles, “perfectly polite, law abiding, middle class people would routinely debate whether armed revolution was necessary for Quebec to gain its independence, considering that change couldn’t be brought about by legal means.”<sup>38</sup> The

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<sup>36</sup> Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 277.

<sup>37</sup> Gérard Pelletier, *The October Crisis* trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 132.

<sup>38</sup> Lysiane Gagnon, “The October Crisis: Singular Anomaly,” *Beaver* Vol 80 Issue 5 (Oct/Nov 2000): 1.

overall separatist agenda which was emerging in Quebec gained further credibility with the provincial pro-separatist Parti Québécois gaining 30 percent of the vote and winning seven seats in the April 1970 election.<sup>39</sup> However, for those who dreamed of attaining independence via the democratic process, the election results were terribly disappointing.

The FLQ had been perpetrating criminal acts since resorting to violence in 1963, and had steadfastly increased their violent activities in the seven years leading up to the October Crisis. Initially, the FLQ used small bombs in their quest for liberation, but increased both the scale and number of bombs planted in the 1967-68 timeframe. They organized civic demonstrations, disseminated propaganda, conducted bank hold-ups, perpetrated raids on firearms dealers, planted dynamite based bombs and stole an array of military and electronic equipment. Several people died trying to diffuse the bombs. In 1969 the official FLQ propaganda vehicle, *Victoire*, pronounced that, “In a little while the English, the federalists, the exploiters, the toadies of the occupiers, the lackies of imperialism – all those who betray the workers and the Quebec nation – will fear for their lives and they will be right.”<sup>40</sup> In February 1970, police foiled an FLQ plot to kidnap the Israeli Consul in Montreal, and in June of that year a similar plan to kidnap the U.S. Consul in Montreal was uncovered. In a disturbing media development during the summer of 1970, several FLQ members held a press conference while training with the Palestine Liberation Organization in Jordan and “announced that the FLQ would shortly begin a campaign of ‘selective assassination’.”<sup>41</sup> In hindsight, this seemingly hollow

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<sup>39</sup> Compared to the 72 seats won by the provincial Liberal Party.

<sup>40</sup> Gérard Pelletier, *The October Crisis* trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 224.

<sup>41</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 28.

bravado would prove to be true in a way that most Canadians would never have imagined.

## **Escalation**

*My conviction has been confirmed that Quebec will become an independent country and that there will be a socialist-style revolution here.*

*- Pierre Vallières (FLQ theoretician)<sup>42</sup>*

Notwithstanding this crescendo of illegal activity and the establishment of a federal anti-terrorist team in 1964, the audacious kidnapping of the British Trade Commissioner James Cross on 05 October 1970 by the FLQ Liberation Cell unquestionably surprised the government and the country. The ransom note, which included a demand to release 23 criminally imprisoned FLQ members, referred to them as ‘political prisoners’ and thus formally introduced this term to Canada. Five days later on 10 October Pierre Laporte, the Quebec Minister of Labour and Manpower was kidnapped by another cell of the FLQ.

As the federal government looked to steady itself and deal with the crisis, which involved overlapping municipal, provincial and federal areas of jurisdiction, it is instructive to place these developments in both the national and international context.

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas M. Regush, Pierre Vallières: *The Revolutionary Process in Quebec* (New York: The Dial Press, 1973), 21.

Violent politically motivated activity of this nature was foreign to Canada. James Cross was the first diplomat ever to be kidnapped in North America;<sup>43</sup> and prior to the (subsequent) murder of Pierre Laporte, in the 103 years since Confederation, Canada had a history of but two politically based killings<sup>44</sup>. In his book *Memoirs*, Pierre Trudeau underlined the extent to which these recent events shocked the government in noting, “Nothing like it had ever happened in Canadian history, and the sheer senselessness of it caught us off guard, which meant that we were badly equipped to deal with it. The action of the terrorists, and the threat they made to kill their hostage if their demands were not met, created a sudden and brutal emergency.”<sup>45</sup>

Specifically within Quebec, in the late 1960s, there were a series of extremist groups including<sup>46</sup> the Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale, the Front de libération populaire, the Ligue pour l’intégration scolaire and the Mouvement du libération du taxi which, in various ways were instigating civil unrest and resorting to violent means to progress their respective causes. As these extremist groups, including the FLQ became increasingly disruptive, the RCMP and police forces, particularly in Montreal, were increasingly unable to investigate and effectively deal with the violence. The police reported that the FLQ were thought to possess several tons of dynamite and

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<sup>43</sup> Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 4.

<sup>44</sup> D’Arcy McGee one of the Founding Fathers of Confederation was assassinated in 1868, and Louis Riel was hung for treason as a rebel leader in 1885.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoires* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 134.

<sup>46</sup> Gérard Pelletier, *The October Crisis* trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 121.

were preparing an associated bombing campaign, and there was suspicion that the FLQ had infiltrated the Montreal police department.<sup>47</sup>

As the crisis progressed, the nascent provincial Liberal government of Robert Bourassa was increasingly ill-equipped to handle the situation. Although Bourassa continued with his planned trip to the United States following the Cross kidnapping, this air of stability soon evaporated. The Laporte kidnapping had a distinct unsettling effect among the members of the Quebec legislature. Federal cabinet documents show that provincial politicians were contemplating resignation of public office and that, "...Mr Bourassa had felt that he could not keep the house or his cabinet together if action were not taken quickly."<sup>48</sup> In a 16 October 1970 letter to the Prime Minister, the Quebec premier declared that his government was, "facing a concerted effort to intimidate and overthrow the government and the democratic institutions of this province through planned and systematic illegal action, including insurrection."<sup>49</sup> Concern in Ottawa was mounting over whether a Canadian civil war could emerge from the crisis. Bryce Mackassey, the federal Minister of Labour, is on record at the time stating that, "if by not helping the Quebec government we were to destroy it, civil war would follow."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Graham Fraser, "Revealed: How FLQ rocked Trudeau cabinet" *Toronto Star*, 24 April 2001, 2.

<sup>48</sup> John Ward, "Federal cabinet feared collapse of Quebec during October crisis" *The Kingston Whig-Standard*, 24 April 2001, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Wallace, "Unsealed British government documents reveal Ottawa did..." *Southam Newspapers*, 05 January 2001, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Jim Bronskill, "Panicky cabinet fought to keep country united: fear of secession, civil war revealed in federal records," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 24 April 2001, 2.

Although revolutionary war had previously occurred on the continent, and with the singular exception of Louis Riel's ill-fated Northwest Rebellion of 1885, the general feeling was that such a development was unlikely in Canada. However, elsewhere in the world the revolutionary ideology of Mao Zedong and Che Guevera had attained ardent followers, and the German-based Bader-Meinhoff gang, the Italian born Brigatte Rosse, the Tupamaros of Uruguay and the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale had all waged violent leftist struggles or wars of national liberation. It is in this unsettling national dynamic and disturbing international context that the champion of civil liberties, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, faced the FLQ crisis in 1970.

**912 420**

*Pierre Laporte, Minister of Unemployment and Assimilation,  
was executed at 6:18 tonight by the Dieppe Cell (Royal 22<sup>nd</sup>).*

*- FLQ note <sup>51</sup>*

In the days following the surprising kidnapping of Mr Cross, and as the government and the country came to fully accept the fact that such an act of political violence was possible in Canada, the affair seemed to lose momentum somewhat as communiqués from both sides were traded publicly. On Friday 09 October, the original seven demands of the Liberation Cell were reduced to two; namely to release the 'political prisoners' and cease all police activity. However, the kidnapping of Pierre Laporte on Saturday 10 October in a Montreal suburb by the Chénier Financing Cell represented a new, alarming trend and added a more sombre twist to the crisis. Several

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<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Levin and Christine Sylvester, *Crisis in Quebec* (Toronto: The Institute for Studies in Education, 1973), 6..

hours later Premier Robert Bourassa advised the Prime Minister that he would need to send the army into Quebec and should consider imposing the War Measures Act. In the same light, on the day after the Laporte kidnapping, the Quebec government solicited the federal government to “consider special measures in order to facilitate and accelerate the work of the police.”<sup>52</sup>

In an initial public show of strength, the government called the army into Ottawa on Monday 12 October 1970 to protect federal ministers and the prime minister. As previously noted, the fledgling Quebec provincial government was clearly seriously unnerved by the developments. In addition, the Montreal police were close to being overwhelmed in dealing with all the investigative leads to be followed, and concern was mounting in Ottawa over how to contain and terminate the crisis.

In the following days, pressure mounted for more forceful federal involvement. The question of options open to the government at the time is an interesting one. Having been initially caught off guard by the Cross kidnapping and then observe a disturbing pattern emerge with the Laporte abduction, the government’s options were few indeed. Critics have contended that since it was traditional police work which eventually led to the capture of the terrorists, the government should have entered into a dialogue with the FLQ while police work continued. This defensive posture would not have necessarily prevented a continuation or escalation of violence and does not take into consideration the exhausted state of the Montreal police force at the time or the crisis-induced fragile

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<sup>52</sup> Gérard Pelletier, *The October Crisis* trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 135.



state of the Quebec provincial government. Intelligence reports on the FLQ were sparse, and to this day it is not known who financed and published the FLQ newsletter. The admission emanating from the federal cabinet in the aftermath of the Laporte murder that, “Neither the government nor the police really knew with whom they were dealing”.<sup>53</sup> underscores the extent to which there was limited situational awareness. A further indication of the degree of uncertainty which surrounded the crisis can be found in federal Justice Minister John Turner’s statement in the House of Commons on Saturday 17 October 1970 regarding the FLQ,

They will stop at nothing to subvert democratic government in this country. While their prime target today may be the government of Quebec, there is every reason to assume – indeed, I think is every clear indication – that other governments and indeed the central government of this country fall within the purview of their endeavours.<sup>54</sup>

Some action to regain the strategic initiative was required. As the government wrestled with this dilemma, it became apparent that options were limited. In searching for “lawful and effective measures”<sup>55</sup> with which to address the situation, and in referring to the War Measures Act, then Secretary of State for External Affairs Gérard Pelletier has noted that, “Canada, no doubt because of its peaceful past, had available no other restrictive law that was more limited and better adapted to the problem.”<sup>56</sup> The other key

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<sup>53</sup> Jim Bronskill, “Panicky cabinet fought to keep country united: fear of secession, civil war revealed in federal records,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 24 April 2001, 2.

<sup>54</sup> George Bain, *et al*, *Power Corrupted*, ed. Abraham Rotstein (Toronto: The Canadian Forum Ltd, 1971), 11.

<sup>55</sup> From the opening statements in the War Measures Act, sourced from Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 283.

<sup>56</sup> Gérard Pelletier, *The October Crisis* trans. Joyce Marshall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 135.

federal official involved in the affair, External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp, has similarly noted that, “If we had anything else, we would not have used the War Measures Act, but we didn’t have anything – not a thing. It was the only instrument at our disposal.”<sup>57</sup>

The Prime Minister was well aware of the legal obligations of the National Defence Act as related to Aid to the Civil Power. In a response that he was lawfully bound to invoke, the Canadian Forces were deployed to the streets of Montreal on Thursday 15 October 1970 to restore public order following a request from the Quebec Attorney General. Following a discussion between the Prime Minister and Mayor of Montreal and Premier Bourassa, in which both Quebec politicians expressed their concern that the situation was spiralling out of control, the Trudeau government, in a move aimed at addressing a state of ‘apprehended insurrection’, invoked the War Measures Act on Friday 16 October 1970 following a late night parliamentary session.

This unprecedented move was the first time the arcane Act had been invoked since World War I, and when it was issued, although it specifically targeted the FLQ in declaring it an unlawful association, the Act affected the country as a whole, not just Quebec. The special measures represented a severe restriction on civil liberties and allowed for the suspension of the lawful imprisonment challenge available under *habeus corpus*, imposed media censorship, and permitted the police to arrest and detain individuals without levelling a charge for up to ninety days.

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<sup>57</sup> Mike Blanchfield, ““Reaction to crisis defended War Measures Act was necessary: ex-ministers,” *The Montreal Gazette*, 07 January 2001, 1.

The following day on 17 October 1970, in a shocking development, Pierre Laporte's murdered body was found in a car<sup>58</sup> in a Montreal suburb. As Richard Gwyn adroitly observed, after this tragic development, "Almost everyone was leaning, literally on Trudeau."<sup>59</sup>

### **Trudeau and Civil-Military Relations**

*And, as everyone knows, the army is a poor training corps for democracy, no matter how inspiring its cause.*

*- Pierre Trudeau*<sup>60</sup>

In analysing Pierre Trudeau's leadership during the crisis it is initially worth comparing his performance, in the civil-military arena, with that of Cohen's four statesmen during wartime.

In the first instance, Cohen's four war statesmen were tested in ways that Trudeau never was. Each of Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill and Ben-Gurion were involved in long nation building or nation threatening wars, and each faced significant reversals and stiff opposition. By contrast, the FLQ crisis cannot be said to represent conflict on the same scale, hence the caveat that Trudeau's evaluation as a war statesman is considered in a unique Canadian context.

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<sup>58</sup> License plate number 912 420

<sup>59</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), 119.

<sup>60</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1974), 601.

Secondly, whereas the great war statesmen were keen students of military affairs, if not technicians or military experts, the same cannot be said of Trudeau. In his read of the geopolitical landscape, where Canadian defence was a logical and guaranteed extension of U.S. security, Trudeau considered that defence policy and the attendant, and often weighty, resource allocation to be anachronistic burdens. Although Trudeau was reasonably well versed in military history, he had a general disinterest for defence matters, and during his brief time in the military was generally bored with the experience. There is an indication that he possessed a basic understanding of military strategic thought, as was evidenced during the divisive Quebec asbestos strike of 1949 when he modified the famous Clausewitz citation of, “War is a continuation of politics by other means’ to describe the strike as, “...no more than the continuation of negotiations by other means.”<sup>61</sup> His world travels, particularly to the Asia-Pacific region, during his younger years had provided him with a close look at revolutionary war. In addition, a recently published book by Max and Monique Nemni titled *Young Trudeau: 1919-1944, Son of Quebec, Father of Canada* reveals that Trudeau belonged to a nationalist, fascist inspired organization in his mid-twenties that imagined an elitist revolution to bring about a Laurentian nation. Although limited weight should be given to the nationalist angle of the story, since Trudeau’s formative intellectual years were still ahead of him at this point, it is interesting to note that early on he seemed to understand both the nationalist cause and revolutionary concepts.

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<sup>61</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 82.

In considering vital national interests, it is submitted that Pierre Trudeau intrinsically understood the Nuechterlein model previously discussed, and, in responding to the October Crisis, applied the Nuechterlein definition of survival and vital issues in a public interest sense in addressing what he saw as an internally generated threat to the homeland. This is consistent with the Clausewitzian notion that state behaviour is driven by the need to survive<sup>62</sup>, and is supported by the Morgenthau premise that a policy is rational if it is meant to preserve the state and its power.<sup>63</sup>

However, notwithstanding the above arguments, Trudeau cannot be considered a student of war in the Lincoln or Churchillian sense, and there is little evidence to support his consideration as a war statesman based solely on Cohen's premise of selecting military leaders and engaging in detailed ways and means discussions in order to make strategic decisions. There is no evidence of Trudeau playing an active role in the selection of general officers, and his interaction with the country's top military officer was limited at best. In reviewing the historical development of the office of the Chief of Defence Staff, Douglas Bland has noted that, "General Sharpe found himself relegated to the sidelines when Trudeau set out to reorder Canadian foreign and defence policies, and this situation deeply wounded the office."<sup>64</sup> As Sean Maloney has observed in his review of the climate leading up to the October Crisis,

There was little or no professional military input, however,  
regarding the Trudeau Government's early attempts to

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<sup>62</sup> Michael G. Roskin, "National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly*, (Winter 1994), 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Douglas L. Bland, *Chiefs of Defence: Government and the Unified Command of the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Brown Book Company Ltd, 1995), 94.

formulate a strategic policy towards separatism. It was only in late 1968 when Trudeau initiated a defence review that the issue of using military forces for IS (internal security) operations in Canada was actually raised. There is no indication that the defence Policy review (DPR) was prompted by the possibility of revolutionary warfare in Canada: it was the result of Trudeau's view that Canada should be less involved militarily in Europe, and an attempt to examine the possibility of Canadian neutrality.<sup>65</sup>

Specifically with respect to the October Crisis, Trudeau did not actively engage or press the RCMP with respect to what they knew of the separatist terrorist organization, nor did he delve into the issue, with the military establishment, of how best to employ the military as it deployed to Montreal during the crisis. A Thursday 15 October 1970 exchange between the Prime Minister and the Vice Chief of Defence Staff Michael Dare is illustrative in this sense. Following the deployment of troops into Montreal, and clearly anxious to regain the initiative, the prime minister told Dare that he wanted, "tanks on all the bridges in Montreal and men all over the city to show these pipsqueaks who had the power."<sup>66</sup> Trudeau's "do as you think best, but we win!"<sup>67</sup> response to Dare's recommendation of a more tempered approach is hardly consistent with the aggressive challenge function exhibited by Cohen's four statesmen.

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<sup>65</sup> Sean M. Maloney, "A 'Mere Rustle of Leaves': The Canadian Strategy and the 1970 FLQ Crisis," *Canadian Military Journal* (Summer 2000): 75.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas L. Bland, *Chiefs of Defence: Government and the Unified Command of the Canadian Armed Forces* (Toronto: Brown Book Company Ltd, 1995), 190.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

However, Trudeau's response does provide a glimpse into his indomitable spirit; a war statesman quality that Cohen found to be key to success in war. In considering Trudeau's candidacy as a war statesman, an examination of the other qualities highlighted by Cohen is more illustrative.

## **True Grit**

*But I had learned that you can win some confrontations just by acting confident.*

*- Pierre Trudeau<sup>68</sup>*

In *Supreme Command*, Cohen observes that the four war statesmen exhibited 'unyielding determination' in their respective campaigns. Each galvanized their respective nation with a defiance and a resolve that captured the imagination and uplifted the spirits of their constituents. Churchill's unforgettable, "We shall never surrender" declaration and Clemenceau's bellicose, "Je fais la guerre"<sup>69</sup> statement were instrumental rallying points for England and France respectively.

Pierre Trudeau was nothing if not determined. As a general criticism his detractors would offer that he was determined to the point of being inflexible, an issue which they contend limited his ability to relate to the people of Quebec. However, at the time of the October Crisis, his over-riding concern was to preserve national unity and the democratic institutions of the country. This point is borne out in his determined and somewhat fatalistic statement that,

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<sup>68</sup> Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoires* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 19.

<sup>69</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 218.

...when you have been elected to govern, you have to do so to the best of your ability, without worrying about the condemnation that might later be levelled at your actions. What was important was to prevent the situation from degenerating into chaos, and the conduct of the elected representatives of the people from being dictated by terrorists.<sup>70</sup>

In referring to Cohen's notion that the war statesmen exhibited fierce resolution without the assurance of survival, this statement is telling in that it shows that Trudeau was determined to do what he thought right yet acknowledged that his (political) future was a secondary consideration. Regardless, he is on record as believing that, "The first duty of government is to govern"<sup>71</sup> and in this light he was predisposed to act.

During the sombre days of October 1970 three small words of determination from the Prime Minister had an unquestionable positive and reassuring effect on the psyche of Canadians. As the military deployed to Ottawa to protect VIPs on 13 October, and two days prior to the invocation of the War Measures Act, Trudeau was accosted by a reporter on the steps of Parliament. In response to a question relating to how far he would go with this military course of action Trudeau responded with his now famous, 'Just watch me' line. Anyone who had seen Trudeau refusing to seek shelter, sitting intransigent and defiant during a 1968 Saint-Jean Baptiste rally that turned ugly would have seen the same steely determination that was on exhibit on Parliament Hill on 13 October 1970.

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<sup>70</sup> Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoires* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 142.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.



In the immediate aftermath of the Cross kidnapping, Trudeau was adamant that there would be no negotiation with, or concession given to, the kidnapers. He initially chastised his Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, for having ceded to one of the kidnapers demands, specifically the reading of the FLQ manifesto on the mass media. Further insight into the full extent of his determination can be seen in a chilling exchange he had with his wife Margaret when, much to her incredulity, he stated he would not enter into negotiations with terrorists if she or their child were kidnapped.<sup>72</sup> Pierre Trudeau personified determination during this time, and FLQ members allowed in the aftermath of the crisis that they had erred in underestimating the prime minister's resolve.<sup>73</sup>

## **Trudeaumania**

*Be a craftsman in speech that thou mayest be strong, for the strength of one is the tongue, and speech is mightier than all fighting.*

*- Maxims of Ptahhotp (3400 B.C.)<sup>74</sup>*

Pierre Trudeau was the first prime minister to use the media in general, and the electronic media in particular, to his advantage. Sporting a keen intellectual mind, a flamboyant personal style, razor sharp debating skills and flawless delivery in either official language, he became a media darling overnight. Canadians had not experienced

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<sup>72</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), 116.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>74</sup> The Quotations Page. "Quotations by phrase: speech." <http://www.quotationspage.com/search.php3?Search=speech&Author=&C=mgm&C=motivate&C=classic&C=coles&C=poorc&C=lindsly&C=net&C=devils&C=contrib&page=2;> Internet; accessed 04 March 2006.

this dramatic and captivating style in a prime minister, and Trudeau left his chief political rival, the cerebral and sincere, yet formal and stiff, Robert Stanfield looking out of date and out of touch.

During the October Crisis, Trudeau capitalized on his natural ability to communicate with the common man. An excerpt from his 16 October 1970 address to the nation following the imposition of the War Measures Act is indicative of the rare communicative ability that Cohen cites as instrumental in a war statesman's ability to lead,

This government is not acting out of fear. It is acting to prevent fear from spreading. It is acting to maintain the rule of law without which freedom is impossible. It is acting to make clear to kidnapers and revolutionaries and assassins that in this country laws are made and changed by the elected representatives of all Canadians – not by a handful of self-elected dictators. Those who gain power through terror rule through terror. The government is acting, therefore, to protect your life and your liberty.

of perversion and terrorism. Through justice, we shall recover our peace and liberty.<sup>76</sup>

These two reassuring communiqués, delivered as they were in a time of unprecedented national uncertainty, were both calming and rallying messages that cemented Pierre Trudeau's image as a leader who would resolve the crisis. When he addressed the nation to explain the imposition of the War Measures Act, Trudeau was a charismatic, credible and uniting presence for a country that was in desperate need of reassurance. In reflecting on the Prime Minister's performance during the crisis, Federal Minister of Communications Erik Kierans observed, "Very cold, very tough, totally determined. He never lost his cool, he was always in command. It was very, very impressive."<sup>77</sup> Even Denis Smith, in his critical assessment of Trudeau's leadership during the crisis titled, *Bleeding Hearts...Bleeding Country*, has allowed that this 16 October address was a masterful and vintage performance,

The address was emotionally powerful, a result of its presentation and content as well as of the drama of the situation. Mr Trudeau sat almost motionless at his desk, his face impassive throughout; but he conveyed the sense of an implacable will and a relentless anger through slight shifts of intonation and an icy stare that shot out at moments from frigid depths. This was a formidable man.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), 121.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>78</sup> Denis Smith, *Bleeding Hearts...Bleeding Country* (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig Ltd Publishers, 1971), 53.

When one considers the other political leaders, including Quebec premier Robert Bourassa, Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau , federal justice minister John Turner or external affairs minister Mitchell Sharp, who could have stepped forward to deliver a similar message, it is hard to imagine that they would have been able to achieve the same result. Trudeau's unparalleled ability to explain the problem, appear confident and deliver a message of promise further underscores the extent of his resilience and determination. As Richard Gwyn has noted, when Trudeau addressed the nation on national television following the death of Pierre Laporte he, "spoke to Canadians in the voice of a hero."<sup>79</sup>

### **The Art of Moderation**

*Yes, well there are a lot of bleeding hearts around who just don't like to see people with helmets and guns.. All I can say is, go on and bleed, but it is more important to maintain law and order than to worry about those whose knees tremble at the sight of the army.*

*- Pierre*

*Trudeau*<sup>80</sup>

To illustrate the complexity of the crisis and put the various government pressures in perspective, it is worth noting that the demands of the kidnappers fell within the jurisdiction of both provincial justice officials and the federal government. Although Trudeau was predisposed to act immediately following the Cross kidnapping, both his respect for the various levels of government jurisdiction and his desire not to appear heavy handed, particularly in his home province, resulted in an initial restrained

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), 120.

<sup>80</sup> Quebec History, "Trudeau's 'Just Watch Me Interview.'" [www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/docs/October/watchme.htm](http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/docs/October/watchme.htm); Internet; accessed 05 April 2006.

approach. In this way Mr Trudeau was true to his personal maxim of ‘la raison avant la passion’ which parallels Cohen’s requirement to be able to discipline one’s passions. To have the federal government impose restrictive measures early on would have only further inflamed sensitivities in Quebec, and Mr Trudeau was well aware of this possibility. In this vein, Dan Loomis strikes a resonant chord when he notes, “...the government needed to assure itself that the “hearts and minds” battle would be decisively won, that whatever was done would result in the population decisively rejecting violence.”<sup>81</sup>

However, as the crisis escalated, Trudeau took the bold and decisive step of imposing the WMA in a move that resonates with Cohen’s second quality of moderation of knowing when and how to counteract a trend. Indeed, this offsetting action was entirely in keeping with Trudeau’s approach, which in his own words was described as, “My political action, or my theory – inasmuch as I can be said to have one – can be expressed very simply: create counterweights.”<sup>82</sup>

Cohen also cites the willingness of the great war statesmen to be ruthless as a quality inherent in moderation. In a callous and ruthless manner similar to Lincoln, Trudeau was willing to suspend the right of *habeus corpus* to achieve his goal; and his ‘go on and bleed’ statement underscores the extent of his toughness and ruthlessness. Trudeau’s counterbalancing philosophy and his willingness to be ruthless for the cause

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<sup>81</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 136.

<sup>82</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo’s Concise Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976), 216.

were in evidence when he addressed a November 1970 Liberal convention on the decision to invoke the War Measures Act,

Life is confrontation, and vigilance, and a fierce struggle against any threat of intrusion or death. We are unworthy of our ideal if we are not ready to defend, as we would life itself, the only roads to change that respect the human person. We are equally unworthy if we are not able to harden ourselves temporarily, but for as long as may be necessary – however repugnant it may be to do so – in order to safeguard and strengthen our democratic institutions and our highly evolved society.<sup>83</sup>

Ever confident, even at the low moment of the crisis, Trudeau personified the moderation and resilience that Cohen observes in a war statesmen.

## **Brave Heart**

*Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand the spines of others are often stiffened.*

*- Billy Graham<sup>84</sup>*

In *Supreme Command*, Cohen concludes in arguing that each of the four statesmen were blessed with a unique form of courage; a courage that, in the fog of war,

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<sup>83</sup> Denis Smith, *Bleeding Hearts...Bleeding Country* (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig Ltd Publishers, 1971), 86.

<sup>84</sup> The Quotations Page. "Quotations by phrase: courage." <http://www.quotationspage.com/search.php3?Search=courage&startsearch=Search&Author=graham&C=mgm&C=motivate&C=classic&C=coles&C=poorc&C=lindsly&C=net&C=devils&C=contrib>; Internet; accessed 04 March 2006.

allowed them to see clearly “without illusions”<sup>85</sup>. Despite the general state of apprehension that gripped the country, and the deep sense of personal loss that Trudeau felt with the murder of Pierre Laporte, he was able to look beyond these obstacles and focus on the strategic objective – national unity.

Notwithstanding his philosophical attachment to the sovereignty of the individual and his quest for the holy grail of a ‘just society’, in the heat of an aberrant threat to the vital interest of national unity, Trudeau exhibited unusual courage in rising above his personal beliefs to impose the draconian War Measures Act. Last used in World War I, he used the Act to address an internal matter and thereby regain the strategic initiative from the FLQ. This is best illustrated in his observation that, “These are strong powers and I find them as distasteful as I am sure you do. They are necessary, however, to permit the police to deal with persons who advocate or promote the violent overthrow of the democratic system.”<sup>86</sup> Under the threat of a possible civil war Trudeau recognized the inherent danger of restricting civil liberties in order to quell the disturbance, and fully appreciated the public rancour and political fallout that such a course of action could entail. This deep courage to cast aside personal beliefs in the interest of the state came at a critical time when the nation’s future was under threat for arguably the first time in history.

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<sup>85</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 224.

<sup>86</sup> Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 70.

## Denouement

*Maintaining unity is the test for any and every government,  
and we judge our PMs by their success in maintaining unity.*

*- Jack Granatstein<sup>87</sup>*

In the contemporary context, Pierre Trudeau was the epitome of a national unity advocate and fierce defender of Canadian federalism. In this regard he was not universally popular, but he was undeniably effective. “That Montreal did not become a North American Belfast and Quebec a variation of Northern Ireland is due principally to him.”<sup>88</sup> Granatstein, once an arch opponent to the War Measures Act, has since mollified his position, and on reflecting on this period has stated that, “Canada itself, also shaken to its roots, continued to exist, and a badly shaken Quebec remained a part of the nation.”<sup>89</sup>

Although there was, and continues to be, opposition to the War Measures Act (WMA) consistent with what Tommy Douglas, the NDP leader, called using, “... a sledgehammer to crack a peanut”<sup>90</sup>, the overwhelming majority of national opinion supported the government’s actions. A December 1970 Gallup poll<sup>91</sup> revealed that fully 89% of English-speaking Canadians and 86% of French-speaking Canadians had endorsed the imposition of the War Measures Act. Although he had been critical of the

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<sup>87</sup> J.L. Granatstein, Speech to Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute: *Multiculturalism and Canadian Foreign Policy*, 31 October 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 80.

<sup>89</sup> Graham Fraser, “October Crisis still a black hole in our history,” *Toronto Star*, 10 May 2003, 2.

<sup>90</sup> Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoires* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 143.

<sup>91</sup> William Tetley, “Looking back at October 1970: Bourassa was strong and cool, Trudeau showed integrity, the war Measures Act was useful and Jerome Choquette was an unsung hero,” *The Montreal Gazette*, 30 September 2000, 2.



government at the time of the crisis, Robert Stanfield, the leader of the federal opposition Conservatives later opined that,

the government has the support of a very, very substantial majority of the Canadian people and the people don't even ask themselves- *they're not interested*- in whether or not the government was justified in any way at all in invoking the War Measures Act, other than that *something* had to be done and they were delighted, for a variety of reasons, that the government had acted vigorously.<sup>92</sup>

Notwithstanding this endorsement, almost immediately after the WMA declaration, the government in general, and Pierre Trudeau in particular, was accused of being heavy handed. Assertions exist to this day that Trudeau was little more than a bully who acted in an unnecessarily aggressive manner to suppress the sovereignty movement. This rather narrow and defensive stance is not in keeping with Trudeau's long standing position that, as long as the separatist movement confined its activities to lawful, democratic activities, there was no question of stifling their actions. When however, this ceased to be the case it was his firm contention that, "society must take every means at its disposal to defend itself against the emergence of a parallel power that defied the elected power in Canada and Quebec."<sup>93</sup>

Of the 497 people who were detained following the WMA legislation, most were released shortly thereafter and very few were charged. Although troops were to remain to Montreal for another two months, and James Cross

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<sup>92</sup> Ron Haggart and Aubrey E. Golden, *Rumors of War* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), 56.

<sup>93</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 156.

would not be freed until 03 December, the imposition of the WMA effectively ended the October Crisis. In an interesting sidebar, Trudeau allowed during a year-end interview in 1977 that, in the event that Quebec sought to illegally secede from Canada he would not hesitate to (re)invoke the War Measures Act.

In seizing the initiative and invoking the Public Order Regulations of the War Measures Act, Pierre Trudeau provided legitimacy to the search, arrest and detain measures put in place. Moreover, it sent an unequivocal signal that, "The State and only the State has the power to determine the political agenda of Quebec"<sup>94</sup>, and reconfirmed to the Canadian people that these extraordinary measures were in response to an extraordinary event.

Although emotions still run high in some parts of the country over this issue, it is difficult to argue, in any persuasive manner, that the democratic cornerstones of freedom of speech, free elections, freedom of the press and the rule of law were irreparably damaged by the temporary invocation of the War Measures Act. The Act was revoked soon after it was imposed, and as Michael Freeman has observed, "the use of emergency powers had no long-term consequences for democracy or civil liberties."<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Freeman goes on to state that, "The commitment to democracy was strong, and the emergency powers maintained the integrity of the institutional safeguards within Canada."<sup>96</sup> In the years that followed the October Crisis, and for reasons not confined to

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Freeman, *Freedom or Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terror*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 128.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

the Quebec independence issue, Trudeau narrowly won a minority government in the 1972 election. As Jack Granatstein has noted, “Trudeau was right; yet, in a curious way, the fact that Canadians could turn so quickly against their leader who had brought them through the October Crisis was the best sign of their democracy’s strength.”<sup>97</sup>

The rifts engendered by a civil war, or in the case of the October Crisis, insurrection and the threat of civil war, take time to heal. As has been noted, to this day there are divided opinions on whether the WMA was appropriate, and whether Pierre Trudeau acted in the interests of Canada, or merely as an arrogant, modern day tyrant who could not stand to be challenged. The evidence speaks for itself. Firstly, the FLQ terrorist movement was removed from the political landscape, and with the notable exception of the bombing of Air India Flight 182 in 1985, terrorism in Canada has ceased to overtly exist. Secondly, and although the people of Quebec have since embraced a Parti Québécois separatist government via democratic elections, they have twice formally rejected the notion of separation from Canada in two plebiscites. Quebec nationalism and separatism are destined to remain woven into the fabric of Canada, but Canadians owe a debt of gratitude to Pierre Trudeau for ensuring that the national fabric will continue to be woven on the loom of democracy.

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<sup>97</sup> Graham Fraser, “October Crisis still a black hole in our history,” *Toronto Star*, 10 May 2003, 2.

The line between determination and arrogance can be thin, and in this context Trudeau's leadership during this time has been sullied by the inescapable fact that he was not viewed as a gracious winner. During his tenure as prime minister he earned a well justified reputation for touting his intellectual superiority, to the point of being flamboyant, egotistical and arrogant. He was unquestionably defiant and resolute when he needed to be, but often failed to endear himself to his fellow Canadians by portraying an air of magnanimity in victory. However, in the uncertain and unprecedented crisis of 1970, he stepped forward to rally a nation and restored public confidence in the federally based general power of 'peace, order and good government' that is at the heart of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1867. Trudeau's fundamental motivation during the crisis can be traced to a farsighted *Cité libre* article he wrote in 1959 wherein he stated,

... we must shun the concept of the state as a machine to command obedience and impose order. The truly democratic state should rather court obedience and serve the citizens' loyalty by maintaining an order that they will think just. Under these conditions the exercise of force (army, prison, police) cannot become a habit of government. ... The state must use force only to the extent that individuals or organizations try to use it themselves against the common good. If it is true in the last analysis that the state must retain the monopoly of force, the purpose is less to use it than to prevent someone else from usurping the thunderbolts.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dan G. Loomis, *Not Much Glory: Quelling the F.L.Q.* (Toronto: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 84.

Although he had consistently shown little regard for the military, both personally and professionally, and showed little, if any, interest in engaging in the sort of vigorous civil-military debate that Eliot Cohen considers fundamental for a war statesman, Pierre Trudeau's performance in October 1970 is *sans pair* in the evolution of the nation, from a conflict perspective. He exhibited the same steely determination, ruthlessness, mastery of communication and courage that enabled Lincoln, Clemenceau, Churchill and Ben-Gurion to overcome significant obstacles and lead their respective countries to victory. In the same manner, in observing on Trudeau's performance during the October Crisis, Richard Gwyn has observed that "Trudeau imprinted himself indelibly on the national consciousness as the compleat, Single Combat champion; fearless, decisive, above all, victorious."<sup>99</sup>

The examination of Trudeau as a war statesman may be difficult for some Canadians to grasp, since Canadians are not accustomed to seeing their political leaders in this light. However, the tragedy of 9 September 2001 should serve as a reminder that our house is indeed flammable and that, increasingly, fire can start by many means. As asymmetric threats build world wide and are increasingly capable of crossing international borders, Canadians would do well to consider the strategic and crisis response leadership qualities of potential prime ministers when they enter the ballot box. In this sense, the study of Pierre Trudeau's leadership during the October Crisis is offered as a case study to promote such debate among Canadians.

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<sup>99</sup> Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1980), 110.

The mesmeric ghost of Pierre Trudeau still floats across the country, inspiring some and haunting others. Irrespective of one's interpretation of events during the October Crisis, most would agree that he defended a nation, and his vision of it, in a way never before seen in Canada. In his unique charismatic, intellectual and combative style he emerged victorious from the crisis, with "...no apologies, few regrets and a bold defence of his old vision of a strong, bilingual Canada."<sup>100</sup> He deserves recognition as a war statesman, albeit in the unique Canadian context of an internally generated threat to the vital national interest – national unity.

The poet Irving Layton may have come closest to being able to unite the opposing views of Trudeau's leadership during the October Crisis when he made the general observation that, "In Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canada has at last produced a political leader worthy of assassination."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> "Trudeau on Trudeau," *MacLean's Magazine*, November 22, 1993, 2.

<sup>101</sup> John Robert Colombo ed, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976), 216.

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