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**Reinforcing Sovereignty with Values:
Canada's Mission in Afghanistan through the lens of National
Interests**

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Abstract

This paper considers an alternative approach to sovereignty by way of a complicated chain of argument related to Canada's mission in Afghanistan. The debates surrounding Canada's contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan are complicated by the relatively high casualty rate and the related sensitivity of the Canadian public to the "rightness" of the mission. Add to this an underlying discomfort among many Canadians with Canadian troops in 'combat' operations as opposed to 'peacekeeping', and it is not surprising that the Afghan mission is such an emotive issue. Essentially, as Canadians feel good about the contributions their troops are making, support for the mission increases; conversely as casualties mount, support drops.

In the fall of 2006, when faced with the realities of declining support as a result of the significant casualties, the Harper government made a concerted effort to bolster public support for the mission. In so doing the government of Canada appealed to traditional Canadian values such as freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. This values-based appeal for support was in the national interest as it translated into a direct and positive effect on the Canada-US relationship. Specifically, the paper argues that the Government of Canada's recent 'values-based' communications campaign emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of Canada's ongoing commitment to Afghanistan bolstered public support for the mission, thereby serving the 'national interest' by reinforcing Canadian 'sovereignty'.

The argument links public messaging, values and public support to a reinforced commitment to the mission and the resultant recognition of Canada's contributions by the United States. Subsequently, this recognition will be shown to contribute directly to the Canadian capacity for independence of action in its relationship with the United States, which will be presented as a national interest, specifically as a variation of sovereignty.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Imagine a relationship of unequal partners in which the stronger of the two dominates the weaker partner to the point that the latter loses its independence. Such a dynamic evokes images of a dysfunctional, if not abusive, relationship. Conversely, a relationship built on trust, mutual respect and independence of thought and action would empower the weaker partner to exert its autonomy.

Canada's contribution to the US-led war on terror has been significant since the attacks of 9/11. Although individual contributions themselves have come in many forms and lasted various lengths of time, the most enduring and certainly most public contribution has been the deployment of combat troops to Afghanistan. Since late 2001, Canadians have openly debated the form and extent of the contribution that Canada should or should not be making to the US-led military effort centred on Afghanistan. Canada has been at the forefront of these activities since it first joined the campaign to reduce the terrorist threats from Afghanistan through Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

As the situation in Afghanistan has evolved, and the contributions of the world community toward rebuilding the fragile nation have increased, so has the nature of the military operations. NATO has taken a far greater role in terms of the command and control of the mission and, the focus on the ground has begun to shift slowly toward reconstruction while security operations continue in support (particularly in the troubled South). Under the construct of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Canada continues to make a significant contribution alongside its NATO partners. With some 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, Canada is the fourth largest contributor within the alliance.¹ The level of Canada's contribution and the nature of employment of the Canadian troops have been, since the earliest days, the subject of much debate within Canada.

At the centre of the debate within Canada seems to be the question of whether what Canadians are doing is 'right', and furthermore whether the effort is 'worthwhile'. The intensity of the debate appears to ebb and flow with the general sense of whether Canadians think that appropriate progress is being made, and to what extent Canada is suffering casualties. Foreign policy analyst Jennifer Welsh characterized the internal debate about Afghanistan as:

... a tension at the heart of Canada's Afghanistan mission: between a very immediate interest in fulfilling commitments to the US and NATO... and a desire to contribute to the longer-term rebuilding and democratization of the country. As the rebuilding efforts become more complex and the visible presence of

¹ http://www2.hq.nato.int/ISAF/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf (accessed 20 Feb 2007).

Canadian combat troops compromises humanitarian objectives, this tension becomes harder and harder to manage.²

The complexity and rhetoric of the debate intensify further when faced with rising casualty rates, as was seen in the fall of 2006 and again most recently in April 2007. Fundamentally, what Canadians are asking is whether the sacrifices of blood and treasure are in fact in the *national interest*. The rhetoric of those opposing continued participation in aggressive security operations appears to be tempered by recognition of the humanitarian aspects of the mission that tend to resonate with most Canadians.

Although it can be appropriate and useful to juxtapose ‘interests’ against ‘values’ in the context of examining foreign policy motivations or outcomes related to a particular decision or event, such a comparative approach can over-simplify what is more frequently a complex inter-relationship of both considerations. Canada’s mission in Afghanistan is a useful case study in the ‘interests’ and ‘values’ dynamic. Much has been written in both academia and the media arguing both extremes of the continuum. Some experts contend that supporting the US, combating terrorism and rebuilding the country are in the national interest; others argue that the use of force and the resultant effects on the population are affronts to Canadian values. Rather than furthering the conflicting nature of these preceding arguments, this paper will instead illustrate how values and interests inter-relate.

The specific contention of this paper is that the Government of Canada’s recent ‘values-based’ communications campaign emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of Canada’s ongoing commitment to Afghanistan bolstered public support for the mission, thereby serving the ‘national interest’ by reinforcing Canadian ‘sovereignty’. The contention is not that the eventual outcome was intentional on the part of the government, but rather the outcome of enhanced sovereignty was a result of “unintended consequences”. The argument will be presented in a rather complicated chain of predominantly theoretical considerations framed in three main thrusts. First, an analysis of the relationship between public messaging, public support and values will establish a foundation for subsequent discussion. Secondly, having established the impact of the government’s messaging on Canadians, the subsequent effects of the reinforced commitment to the mission and the resultant recognition of Canada’s contributions, in particular by the United States, will be examined. Thirdly, having established a measure of recognition by the United States, suitable interpretations of ‘national interests’ and ‘sovereignty’ will be presented and subsequently discussed in the context of the Canada – United States relationship. Ultimately, the notion of independence of action, defined as sovereignty, resultant from the recognition and respect afforded Canada by the US will be shown to serve the national interest.

² Welsh, Jennifer M "The 2005 International Policy Statement." *International Journal* 61, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 909-928 (page 4/5)

Chapter 2 – Canadian “Values” And Public Opinion: Selling an Unpopular Mission

9/11 and the “Fickleness” of Canadians

Although there continues to be dissenting opinions as to exactly how Canada ended up where it is, and doing what it’s doing in Afghanistan, the origins of the mission can be traced back to September 11th, 2001. It is important to establish the roots of the mission, as they grew from the emotions of the immediate 9/11- era at an arguably rare moment in time when there was unusual congruence in Canada’s interests and values. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, there was a tremendous outpouring of support toward the US from the Canadian population, and an equally compelling desire to do something definitive in response to those attacks. Canadians felt that their sense of values, in particular their respect for the rule of law and underlying desire for peace, had been assaulted. Equally, the practical implications of Canada’s close relationship with the US and the overwhelming responses of the world community left Canada with little option but to act in the interest of maintaining credibility with the US. This was even more compelling in the shadow of President Bush’s “you’re either with us or with the terrorists” speech of 23 September 2001. In this moment of international crisis, interests and values converged leaving no doubt as to the importance of Canada’s joining the US in its campaign against terror and the related logic of Canada’s deployment to Afghanistan. The primary motivation was to combat terrorism, and in the immediacy of the aftermath of 9/11 there was a common acceptance of the validity of such a mission.

The key points of the public messaging associated with the mission in Afghanistan have been fairly consistent over time. This consistency is perhaps best captured in Foreign Affairs Canada’s official documentation on the Afghan mission wherein it states, “the interests that motivated Canada’s initial engagement in Afghanistan have not changed. Our main objective is to help Afghanistan become a more secure and self-sufficient democratic state that it never again serves as a terrorist haven.”³ This relatively recent (2005) statement, admittedly from the previous government of Paul Martin, nonetheless captures the timelessness of the objectives of the mission, and also reinforces the underlying anti-terrorist theme that motivated the initial response. As time has marched on however, particularly as the relative recentness and emotional relevance of the 9/11 attacks has waned and as Canada has assumed a more aggressive combat role in the volatile southern region, the Canadian population has become fickle; challenging both the motivation behind, and necessity for, the ongoing mission in Afghanistan. The root cause(s) of this questioning of the mission is (are) uncertain; frustration, disappointment and collective impatience are likely key contributors.

³ Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, *Canadians Making a Difference in the World: Afghanistan*. Ottawa: Government of Canada, Page 1

The Challenges of a New Government

Early in 2006 Canadians elected a Conservative minority government under the leadership of Prime Minister (PM) Stephen Harper. Upon taking power there were relatively solid levels of support (55% in favour) for the mission in Afghanistan.⁴ Irrespective of the level of support he inherited however, Harper took a very clear and public stand and openly supported the mission. This message was telegraphed loudly through Harper's early visit to Afghanistan in March 2006 and the associated proclamations of support. The language of the new government's message was consistent in its strength and bluntness. The Harper government left no doubt as to where they stood, and the key thematic messages ran along the lines of the mission being the "right thing to do" and "in the national interest"⁵. Further, Harper himself stressed the importance of showing leadership and being a strong international partner in the counter-terrorism campaign.⁶

Later in the spring of 2006, the Harper government faced the challenge of extending the mission in Afghanistan. Although there has been much unresolved debate as to the practice and motivation of the government in tabling the extension, for the purposes of this discussion, the most important issue is the associated messaging. On 17 May 2006 the government surprised the House of Commons with an unscheduled motion to extend the mission by two years (until February 2009) and took the opportunity to once again bolster support for the mission and reinforce their unwavering support for it despite calls by opposition members to 'bring the troops home'. In his speech to the House of Commons, the PM stressed decisiveness on the part of Parliament so as not to make the troops 'vulnerable'. He further reminded Canadians of the threat of terrorism through references to 9/11, Madrid, and Bali, stressing that Canada is not immune. In what could perhaps be described as an appeal to Canadians' traditional sense of values, the PM stated "we will never be immune as long as we are a society that defends freedom, democracy and human rights".⁷ In stressing these traditional values, Harper's speech also played-up an underlying theme of a potential conflict of beliefs as a concern for Canadians – the notion of right against wrong. Further references to the plight of women and children, and the threat of Taliban and Al-Qaeda to stability in Afghanistan underscored the pressing need to help the Afghan people. "Stay the course" was the message; and the decision of the majority of the members was to support the troops and the mission through a re-affirmation of Canada's commitment. Despite the swiftness of the decision, this was far from the end of the debate for the Harper government.

⁴ Strategic Council, A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV – Perceptions and Views of Canadian Armed Forces Troops in Afghanistan, March 2006

⁵ O'Connor, The Honourable Gordon, MND letter to the Editor, Toronto Star, 22 Apr, 2006

⁶ Blanchfield, Mike "PM confirms commitment: Afghanistan mission 'goes to heart of what Canada is all about':[Final Edition]." Edmonton Journal, March 13, 2006

⁷ Harper's Speech to House of Commons, 17 May 2006– PM Website

Casualties and Declining Public Support

The summer of 2006 was a particularly challenging period as the Harper government struggled to maintain support for the Afghanistan mission in the face of mounting casualties. The operational highlight of the summer of 2006 was the widely reported Operation Medusa. A Canadian-led counter-Taliban combat operation, Medusa was an extremely intensive series of battles that saw the highest rates of fatalities since Canada joined the effort in Afghanistan. In fact, over the entire summer (May- Sep, 2006) Canada suffered 22 fatalities: 8 in August and 10 in September alone.⁸ This was the highest number of fatalities of any month since the beginning of the mission (in fact since the Korean War) until the recent string in April of 2007 when 8 Canadians were killed in a single week. The summer of 2006 saw almost 25% of all casualties to date in Afghanistan. This was a defining period in terms of public support for the mission, and it presented the government with a significant challenge.

The resulting downturn in public support was measurable and dramatic according to available polling data. In July, the polls indicate that public support was down to 39% (from a high of 55% in March) with the majority of those surveyed thinking that things were likely to get worse.⁹ As the summer of 2006 progressed, the results worsened and the impending loss of public confidence was further reinforced in August when the level of measurable support dropped to 37%; the lowest of all time. Polls also showed that most (58%) Canadians believed that the price of casualties was too high.¹⁰

Clearly, support for the mission was in decline, and it appeared the government might be backing a loser. Historian and political commentator David Bercuson remarked on the loss of support "I think people conflate Iraq with Afghanistan...so the Americans...are getting their clocks cleaned in Iraq, surely the same thing is going to happen in Afghanistan."¹¹ This relationship between public support, casualties and the public need for success is not uncommon in modern conflict situations. Much has been written on casualty sensitivity, especially in the context of Vietnam and Iraq. Although experts in this field of study have written mostly from the US perspective, the main themes seem readily applicable to the Canadian paradigm. Despite suggestions that mounting casualties do not always produce reductions in public support, experts in casualty sensitivity contend that at the root of the issue is a sense of weighing the human costs of conflict. Most important in determining the level of support (a.k.a. willingness to tolerate combat deaths) are beliefs about the 'rightness or wrongness' of the war and beliefs about its likelihood of success¹² (in other words 'win-ability'). The concepts of 'rightness' and potential success (or conversely failure) are central to the recent Canadian

⁸ CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/gmaps/afghanistan/> (Accessed March 14, 2007)

⁹ Strategic Council, A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV – Perceptions of the Conservative Government, Troops in Afghanistan, July 18 2006.

¹⁰ Strategic Council, A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV – Middle East Conflict, Afghanistan, Aug 14 2006.

¹¹ CBC News, "Fewer Canadians 'Strongly Approve' of Afghan Mission: Survey", November 9, 2006 (10:33 PM ET)

¹² Gelpi, Christopher, Peter D Feaver and Jason Reifler. "Success Matters: Casualty Sensitivity and the War in Iraq." *International Security*, Vol 30, no. 3 (January 1, 2006): p. 8 (*Parenthesis added for emphasis*)

experience. The government must have realized, in the face of mounting casualties and the resultant reductions in support, that Canadians were *weighing the human cost of* Afghanistan. Toronto Star columnist Wendy Cox supports this perspective in her remarks that the polls were showing significant declines in support for the effort (in Afghanistan), and she further described the situation (in terms of the messages the poll results were sending) as “bleak”.¹³

In response, the choice for the government was relatively straightforward: reduce the casualties or promote the value of the effort (meaning the perception of the ‘rightness’ of the mission) in the minds of Canadians. Given that they had very limited practical capacity to directly affect the former without a potentially humiliating withdrawal, they chose the latter.

A New Message for Canadians

Exactly when the Harper government changed its approach to the messaging about Afghanistan is uncertain. There are however indications that in the fall of 2006 the government changed tack and stepped-up its public relations efforts associated with the Afghan mission. Not only did the tone and frequency of the messages change; so did the emphasis. The pitch at home focused on responsibility to protect Canadians (in the broadest sense) and an appeal for popular support¹⁴. The appeals to Canadians for support appeared to come mostly in the form of positive messages about progress on the ground (particularly in the areas of humanitarian assistance), a renewed sense of the responsibility to protect, and an obligation by Canada to engage in international affairs. In essence, the Harper government went back to the fundamentals of what appeals to Canadians in the context of international affairs. There was a clear appreciation within key offices of the government that the humanitarian (soft) messages resonate with Canadians.¹⁵ This approach mirrors the concept of “humane internationalism” as an ethical obligation toward those beyond their borders.¹⁶ This broad-based appeal to the fundamental, humanitarian, aspects of Canadian foreign policy are consistent with what policy analyst Steve Lee describes as a “core set of Canadian values.”¹⁷

Perhaps the seminal event in the shift of public messaging was PM Harper’s appearance before the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006. In his address the PM stressed the importance to Canada and to the member nations of rebuilding Afghanistan. He further reinforced the ‘good news’ stories and continued to vilify the Taliban. He referred to the rebuilding of schools “ripped down by the Taliban”,

¹³ Cox, Wendy "Defence Minister O'Connor begins PR effort to sell Afghanistan mission." Canadian Press NewsWire, 14 November 2006.

¹⁴ Cox, Wendy (Toronto Star: November 14, 2006)

¹⁵ Although confirmed in a briefing to NSSP 9 at DFAIT on 20 March, the source document (a report on a series of focus groups and public opinion surveys conducted by DFAIT) was requested but was not made available before the time of writing. It is expected to be released by the fall of 2007.

¹⁶ Don Munton and Tom Keating, *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, No. 3 (September 2001), p.17 (of CFC Handout), p. 534/535 of original pages 517-541. (see notes #58-60)

¹⁷ Lee, Steve. “Canadian Values in Canadian Foreign Policy”. *Canadian Foreign Policy*, Vol 10, No 1 (Fall 2002), p. 1.

the repatriation of refugees, the increased numbers of children in school, and the impressive participation of Afghans in their elections as examples of progress.¹⁸

The government's messaging was consistent over the subsequent weeks and months, and key ministers became the lead spokespersons in the communications campaign. The messaging continued what could be described as a list of humanitarian victories intended to appeal to the population at large. In addition to the positive messages from his cabinet colleagues, the MND ratcheted-up the anti-Taliban rhetoric: "Pulling out now would give the Taliban a chance to regain its stronghold, leading to the kinds of abuses that saw women marginalized, routine executions in stadiums and historical monuments destroyed."¹⁹ Clearly, the intent was to not only reinforce the 'good news', but also establish the prospect of Taliban success as an unacceptable outcome in the minds of most Canadians. This approach is entirely consistent with addressing the previously discussed concept of the 'rightness' of the mission.

The approach taken by the Harper government, although appropriate to the situation, was neither particularly special nor original. To the contrary, the key themes of the government's approach were in harmony with their own party platform, well-documented constants in Canadian attitudes toward foreign policy, and ongoing debates in the US regarding the war in Iraq. The Canadian Conservative Party's 2006 Election Platform speaks to international responsibility²⁰ which can be easily equated to what political scientists Munton and Keating describe as a overwhelming and distinct desire on the part of Canadians to "do something", or "activism", on the international stage.²¹ Perhaps more importantly however, the public appeals to average Canadians were founded in humanitarian beliefs that point directly to underlying Canadian values. At the UN for example, the PM spoke to the principles of "freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law"²², reinforcing the main pillars of what Canadians believe to be important. The subsequent and supporting messages were all equally values-based and consistent with a "strong nostalgic attachment" to the concept of internationalism.²³ Notwithstanding the pedigree of the underlying themes adopted by the government, the fact remains that there was a conscious and significant effort to appeal to Canadians' sense of values in the hope of propping-up support for the mission. The resultant question is whether the efforts were successful or not.

¹⁸ PM Address to 61st Opening Session of UN General Assembly, 21 September 2006 (PM Website)

¹⁹ Cox, Wendy. "Defence Minister O'Conner begins PR Effort to Sell Afghanistan Mission", Canadian Press, Toronto, Nov 14, 2006.

²⁰ "Stand up For Canada" CPC 2006 Election Platform, page 45.

²¹ Don Munton and Tom Keating, *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34, No. 3 (September 2001), p.22 (of CFC Handout), p. 539/540 of original pages 517-541.

²² PM Speech to UN, 21 September 2006

²³ Smith, Heather, review of Cooper et al., *Niche Diplomacy*, *Canadian Foreign Policy* 6 (1998), Keeble and Smith, (re) *Defending Traditions*, p.58 (As quoted by Munton and Keating, p16 – see note #54)

The Results of the New Messages

Measuring a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the change in message and the opinions of most Canadians is not an exact science. With that said however, one can draw some reasonable conclusions regarding trends in the results of public opinion polls. Having established the summer lows of public support, one can draw a direct comparison with the results that followed the government's communications campaign.

As is perhaps understandable, the results in terms of a rebound in public support were not immediate. By October 2006 however, the polls indicated that support had slowly started to rebound and was back up to 44% (from the previous low of 37%). In addition to the modest increase in support, the polls started to indicate a significant (83%) majority of those polled who were proud of what Canada was doing in Afghanistan.²⁴ Without debating the exact numbers themselves, the key point is that there was a definite upward trend not only in raw percentages, but also in terms of the increasingly positive attitudes expressed by those polled. Journalist Peter O'Neil, referring to the previous comments of David Bercuson about the potential loss of confidence in the mission, highlighted the increased support in a January 2007 article wherein he suggested that perhaps Canadians were developing a sense of possible victory as opposed to the 'lost cause' perspective that seemed apparent in the fall. O'Neil further cited a popular support level of 60% and noted that the polling results showed an overwhelming sense that Canadians believed they were providing critical assistance and trying to create a peaceful democratic country in Afghanistan.²⁵ This perspective of increasing optimism is shared with, and supported by, an Angus Reid Poll of January 2007 that shows more Canadians are "OK" with the Afghan mission with 58% supporting it (the highest levels of support to date).²⁶

The positive messaging of the government and the resultant bolstering of public support has continued, perhaps in an ongoing effort to sustain the results²⁷. Relatively recent comments by the MND, for example, perpetuate the humanitarian message of helping others in need and the strangely positive message that "...we are being attacked because we are achieving success". The messaging of early 2007 also continues the 'good news' through the use of facts and figures showing 'progress'²⁸. The government also touched a cornerstone of traditional Canadian foreign policy beliefs and practices,

²⁴ Strategic Counsel, A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV – North Korea, Afghanistan and Liberal leadership, 16 October 2006

²⁵ Peter O'Neil, *Afghan Mission Support Rebounds Slightly*, Vancouver Sun, CanWest News Service, Jan 13 2007.

²⁶ Angus Reid Global Monitor, January 17, 2007.

(www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/14414)

²⁷ Although public support averages around 50%, the most recent (25 April) polls show a continuing decrease (46%) and a fairly high indication that the price of life is too high (61%). Given the recent string of fatalities this is not surprising.

Source: Strategic Council, A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV – Afghanistan, Kyoto and the gun Registry, 25 April 2007.

²⁸ MND Speaking Points, 20 January 2007. (www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=2181)

multilateralism, by emphasizing that Canada is not in Afghanistan unilaterally, but is there alongside NATO with the mandate of the UN.

There have been unquestionable efforts to portray the mission in Afghanistan in its most human dimensions over the past several months. This has been part of a coherent campaign by the government to appeal to the values of Canadians in the hopes of bolstering support for the mission. The results of the government's efforts appear to have been positive. Although it could be argued that the relative upturn in support may have been a result of reduced casualties and not directly as a result of the governments messaging, this counter argument is fundamentally flawed for two reasons. First, there was both a sustained (albeit lower) rate of casualties over the period of October-December 2006²⁹. Second, in considering the 'rightness' of the mission, the increases in the positive impression of rebuilding Afghan society (as presented by O'Neil – see note #25) have nothing to do with casualties and could therefore only be linked to positive messaging.

To fully appreciate the results of the increases in public support in the proper context, the broader impacts of Canada's contribution to Afghanistan need to be examined.

²⁹ See CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/gmaps/afghanistan/> Fatalities: October (5), November (2), December (0). Accessed 04 May 2007.

Chapter 3 - Beyond The Messages: Popular Support, Canada's Contribution and the Resulting Effects

The Importance of Popular Support

In examining the effectiveness of the government's messaging, one needs to look beyond the immediate impact on public opinion. The broader impact of Canada's contribution to Afghanistan and the resultant effects on Canada's standing in the world, in particular with the US, are more useful indicators of the results of the government's actions.

Popular support, although perhaps the immediate aim of the governments' efforts related to the Afghan mission, is not typically an end unto itself. Rather, increased popular support provides governments with flexibility and options. More to the point, increased popular support reinforces the government's position in terms of commitment to the mission. The change in messaging arrested a rapid and concerning decline in public support that could have potentially undermined the capacity of the government to sustain the mission. Although it could be argued that the Harper government would have stood by the commitment irrespective of public opinion, the turn-around in terms of support unquestionably facilitated the situation. It became not only 'right' but also relatively 'popular' to continue to support Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. Canadians had accepted both the 'rightness' and potential 'win-ability' of the mission. This freshly optimistic perspective effectively stopped a dangerous downward trend in public that could have been highly problematic for the government.

The relationship between popular support and the ongoing contributions by Canada is neither direct nor linear. One cannot demonstrate the direct effect of popular support on Canada's mission, as nothing changed significantly when popularity increased. With that said however, one can argue, in a contrary fashion, the benefits of what transpired based on what didn't happen. From the perspective of what was avoided, had the downward trend in public opinion continued, the results could have been significant. Although impossible to predict the exact results, potential outcomes could have included a loss of confidence in the government and/or a premature withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. Recognizing the potential pitfalls of exploring 'what-if' scenarios, it is useful, especially in terms of arguing the value of the government messaging efforts, to examine what may have been avoided by the upswing in popular support.

Most significantly at risk was Canada's reputation as a reliable partner and ally. An untimely reduction or withdrawal of support would have unquestionably tarnished Canada's standing, especially in the minds of the US. Not only would Canada have been seen to not be taking security seriously, but it would have undermined the fundamental

precept of what Rempel describes as working in good faith with its key partner³⁰. Essentially, by ‘staying the course’ Canada avoided squandering the credits it had built-up after 9/11 and further satisfied Washington’s overwhelming preoccupation with security concerns in a fashion that, in the words of former Ambassador Allen Gottlieb, based on his arguably dated experience, “opens doors in Washington like nothing else.”³¹

Measuring the Resultant Effects

As mentioned previously, Canada’s contributions to both OEF and now ISAF have been significant. There has been much debate as to how Canada’s commitment evolved from what was a relative modest contribution to the US-led OEF mission to what is now the fourth largest contingent in Afghanistan (behind US, UK and Germany)³². What matters for this discussion however, is not why Canada is in Afghanistan, but the effect Canada’s contribution is having both in Afghanistan and on the broader international stage.

Measuring the effects in an empirically or statistically significant way would be both difficult and potentially inconclusive. As the ability to measure the effects and their resultant impacts is nearly impossible, developing a useful framework for measuring the extent of Canada’s contribution is therefore extremely challenging. For the purposes of this discussion we shall examine the recognition afforded Canada as a result of the efforts and sacrifices made by Canadians (civilian and military). The unit of measure for this analysis is therefore the frequency and nature of public statements by key figures praising Canada’s efforts in Afghanistan. There is unfortunately no practical way to undertake this analysis without addressing the issue of casualties. Recognizing however, that in times of significant loss, commentary is consistently positive. The proposed unit of measure is still useful. In fact, our most potentially useful indicator is the recognition of Canadian ‘blood and treasure’ spilt half way around the world. Although this may appear to be callous and disrespectful, it is instead a very important and relevant measurement as it links directly back to the previously discussed issue of *casualty sensitivity* and the corresponding impact of casualties on public support for the mission.

With an average troop strength of roughly 2,500 (of the approximately 35,000 in ISAF)³³, Canada has suffered a disproportionate number casualties in comparison to the number of troops in Afghanistan.³⁴ As of May 2007, Canada is tied for 2nd in casualties (after the US and UK)³⁵ with less than 10% of the total troops and over twice the percentage of the total number of casualties (20%). These numbers alone speak to the

³⁰ Rempel, Roy. ‘Dreamland – How Canada’s Pretend Foreign Policy has Undermined Sovereignty’, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006. p. 6

³¹ Quoted in Dunsky, Dan. Canada’s Three Solitudes. National Interest. Winter 2005/06 Issue 82, p. 96.

³² NATO, ISAF. http://www2.hq.nato.int/ISAF/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf (accessed 20 Feb 2007)

³³ NATO, ISAF. http://www2.hq.nato.int/ISAF/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf (accessed 20 Feb 2007)

³⁴ King & Farley, “Afghan War Takes a Toll on Canada”, Los Angeles Times, January 29 2007.

³⁵ As of 14 May, Canada was tied with the UK for the 2nd most fatalities (54 each). <http://www.icasualties.org/oef/> (accessed 14 May 2007)

significance of the sacrifices made by Canadians. With that said, it should not come as a surprise that the significance of these figures has not been lost on the leadership of NATO and the United States. Essentially, it's all about recognition and respect, even if they were not necessarily the motivating reasons for Canada's contribution from the outset.

Recognition and Respect

Canada's place within the NATO alliance has seen a significant shift since the early days of the Afghanistan mission. At the inception of the mission in late 2001, Canada was a relatively small player in the alliance and was still in the process of drawing down its contribution to the Balkans. Since then Canada has gone from a relatively minor, albeit appreciated, contributor to a significant leader at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, especially in what is unquestionably the toughest part of the country. Add to this the major sacrifices by Canadians, and there is little doubt as to the heightened stature of Canada in Brussels. As remarked by Canada's Military Representative to NATO, the sense in the Headquarters is that "Canada is back"³⁶. Other positive indicators of this enhanced recognition are reflected in the resounding public support that Canada received to its pleas for extra troops to deploy to the south of Afghanistan in the fall of 2006, and the related issue of 'caveats'³⁷ in the lead up to the Riga Summit in November 2006.

In what was perhaps the earliest indicator of international public recognition, last summer during a visit to Canada, the NATO Secretary General, reversing a well-established pattern of his predecessors of criticizing Canada for not doing enough within the alliance,³⁸ praised Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. His remarks "well done, keep up the good work"³⁹, although perhaps insignificant on the surface in the minds of some, instead underscore the recognition and importance of Canada's efforts. The Secretary General was not alone in his praise. As the alliance moved toward the Riga Summit, wherein a major subject of discussion was 'burden-sharing' within ISAF, several other NATO officials offered similar recognition of Canada's efforts.

Former Supreme Allied Commander, Gen James Jones remarked in the context of leadership in Afghanistan and the threat of the Taliban "they chose to test Canada and Canada responded magnificently...the enemy was soundly defeated." In reference to the issue of burden sharing he further commented, "there's a different metric when your country is being shot at and not all the others are coming to your aid...it's a question of

³⁶ VAdm Glenn Davidson, CANMILREP, during NSSP 9 visit to NATO HQ, March 2007 (with permission)

³⁷ A highly contentious, and often acrimonious, debate that pitted various alliance members against each other as the issue of whether certain forces could be employed without restrictions (caveats) anywhere in Afghanistan

³⁸ See, for example, Sharon Hobson, "Stretching to the Limit," Jane's Defence Weekly (2 February 2000, p. 27)

³⁹ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General, Address at the Canadian War Museum, 15 June 2006. (<http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060615a.htm>)

equity and fairness.”⁴⁰ This recognition and respect is however not restricted to the inner workings of the alliance; the leadership in Washington was also paying attention.

Washington Notices

Although perhaps there are many in Canada who would cringe at the thought of earning favour in Washington, the reality is that Canada’s efforts in Afghanistan swayed the perception of Canada in the minds of many Americans including key White House officials and some media pundits as well. The perception of getting too close to Washington, and in particular under the current leadership of President G.W. Bush, is fraught with risk for a Canadian PM. What Washington thinks and says however are important, especially if they are saying good things about Canada. The praise offered by US officials is indicative of the recognition and respect afforded Canada due to its efforts in Afghanistan.

In the run up to Riga in November 2006, US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns remarked “we’re pleased to see the way that Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have acquitted themselves. Each of these three countries has taken a significant number of casualties.”⁴¹ Further, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Daniel Fried, in an effort to support the Canadian position that there is a disproportionate share of the burden within the alliance and ultimately convince other countries to ‘step-up’, remarked “Canadians especially said, ‘wait a minute’...how come us? Why did we draw a short straw...?”⁴² It is difficult to imagine these sorts of public comments being made were there not an underlying sense of recognition, admiration and respect for Canadian efforts in Afghanistan.

President Bush himself, in July 2006 during a visit by PM Harper, commended not only Canadian participation in Afghanistan, but also the then recent (May ‘06) decision to extend the mission by remarking “this is a serious foreign policy decision by the government”. Bush further complemented Canadians by stating that “their soldiers are doing fantastic work...and they’re making the country proud.”⁴³ Most recently, Bush reinforced the importance of allied support in the campaign in Afghanistan, although unfortunately Canada was not specifically mentioned.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it is clear that Bush was made aware of Canada’s contributions and chose to comment favourably and publicly in recognition thereof.

In the same month as the PM’s meeting with Bush, during his visit to Washington, MND O’Connor met with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld who provided

⁴⁰ Fisher, Matthew. “Canada’s Efforts Praised”, Leader Post. Regina, Sask. Nov 01, 2006.

⁴¹ Koring, Pat. “US Backs NATO Plea”. The Globe and Mail. Toronto, ON. Nov 22, 2006. p.A.25. Parenthesis added.

⁴² Koring, *ibid*.

⁴³ Bush, George W. President of the United States. Address in the East Room during Visit of Canadian PM Stephen Harper. July 06, 2006. (<http://whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/07/print/20060706.html>)

⁴⁴ Bush, George W. President of the United States. Fact Sheet – Increasing Support to Help the People of Afghanistan Succeed. (<http://whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/02/print/20070215.html>)

equally complimentary remarks regarding Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. "Canada has been a significant contributor and has taken a leadership role there (Afghanistan), and is making a very valuable contribution. They've got a very professional military and (are) doing a fine job."⁴⁵ The compliment, from a now discredited and 'retired' source, is no less significant as it is the essence of the message, not necessarily the source, that matters.

Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, is probably the most respected senior official in the US Administration. Given her superb reputation and penchant for directness and candour, her comments are all the more compelling. She is certainly most vocal and prolific in her extensive praise and respect for Canada's efforts in Afghanistan. In September of 2006 Rice remarked, "the Canadian role in Afghanistan is absolutely crucial..." and further that "they (the Taliban) have learned a tough lesson, that the Canadian are fierce fighters..." Rice went on to include Canada as a key partner in the campaign against terror "the work that Canada is doing is essential to that fight...this is a noble cause and we're going to win."⁴⁶ Rice also reinforced PM Harper's message of the importance of sustaining the effort (staying the course) by remarking, in response to a question about the ongoing debate within Canada about casualties and the fragility of public support, "I think a premature withdrawal of Canadian or any forces from Afghanistan would have a destructive and devastating impact on what is now a very fierce effort to finally secure Afghanistan."⁴⁷

Dr. Rice did not restrict her comments to Afghanistan exclusively and she commented extensively during her September 2006 visit on the nature and strength of the Canada – United States relationship. These broader comments, although not directly related to the analysis of the recognition of the Canadian contribution to Afghanistan, are still relevant to the discussion as they establish the tenor of the partnership. In the course of her visit to Canada last fall, while commenting on the contributions in Afghanistan, Rice described the CAN-US relationship as one "based on values and friendship" and further stated the "...relationship is very, very strong."⁴⁸

During a more recent meeting with Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Peter MacKay, in December 2006, both Rice and MacKay remarked repeatedly on the shared friendship and shared responsibilities of the two countries. Rice again praised Canada and its ongoing efforts and spoke of the importance of mutual respect in the CAN-US relationship. Rice stated "Canada is a friend with which we, of course, share values but with which we are also now sharing many of the duties and responsibilities of the global struggle in the war on terrorism", and she further reiterated "...Canadian Forces have been stalwart fighters..." MacKay contributed to the exchange by acknowledging "how

⁴⁵ Rumsfeld, Donald. US Secretary of Defense. Comments made during the visit of MND Gordon O'Conner at the Pentagon, 27 July 2006.

(<http://www.defenselink.mil/Transcripts/Transcripts.aspx?TranscriptID=3675>)

⁴⁶ Rice, Condoleezza. US Secretary of State. Interview with Michael Tutton of the Canadian Press. September 12, 2006. (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm2006/72074.htm>)

⁴⁷ Rice, Condoleezza. US Secretary of State. Interview with Amy Smith of the Halifax Chronicle Herald. September 12, 2006. (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm2006/72105.htm>)

⁴⁸ Rice, Condoleezza. US Secretary of State. Interview with Steve Murphy of ATV Evening News. September 12, 2006. (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm2006/72084.htm>)

forthright and respectful you've been in expressing the appreciation of the United States of Canada", and commented further on the maturity of the CAN-US relationship.⁴⁹

As a somewhat surprising indicator of the recognition afforded Canada, the US media have also picked-up on the Canadian contributions and have been extremely complimentary in their reporting thereof. In a November 2006 New York Times editorial, that famous daily remarked "Canadian, Dutch, British and American forces in southern Afghanistan are doing most of the heavy fighting..."⁵⁰ In January 2007, on the other side of the country, Los Angeles Times reporters wrote "in the wind-scoured high desert that was once the heartland of the Taliban movement, the will and determination of a little-heralded American ally have been undergoing a harsh test."⁵¹ Most recently, the Wall Street Journal, in a somewhat backhanded fashion, also commented favourably on Canada's contribution to Afghanistan.⁵² These newspaper quotations are perhaps the most significant of all of the US commentary, as, unlike the politicians, they have nothing to gain by being complimentary. The US officials, it could be argued, are required to be 'nice' and diplomatic and as a result their remarks are potentially questionable. Notwithstanding this possibility, the volume and consistency of the official messages from Washington leaves little doubt as to their legitimacy and significance.

Having examined the effects of Canada's efforts in Afghanistan on the Canada – United States relationship, the specific implications of that relationship needs to be explored in the context of national interests, and in particular in relation to the concept of sovereignty.

⁴⁹ Rice, Condoleezza. US Secretary of State. Remarks with Canadian Foreign Minister (Washington, DC) December 21, 2006. (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm2006/78181.htm>)

⁵⁰ "Slouching Toward Riga", New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast), New York, NY. Nov 28, 2006. Pg. A.22.

⁵¹ King & Farley, LA Times. January 29, 2007.

⁵² O'Grady, Mary Anastasia, "Canada's Cut and Run Crowd, The Wall Street Journal, May 14, 2007, p.A16.

Chapter 4 – Canada’s National Interests and Sovereignty: The Canada – United States Relationship in Action

Defining National Interests

An ‘interest’ by definition is a subject about which one is concerned or enthusiastic; a group having a common concern, especially in politics.⁵³ Derived from the Latin word for ‘important’, an interest is therefore something that is important to the person or group with, or by, whom it is identified. By extension, it can be argued that national interests are therefore things that are important and/or of concern to a particular nation. Comparative definitions of national interest from various sources employ similarly ambiguous language that includes “interests specific to a nation-state, including especially survival and maintenance of power”⁵⁴ and “a country's goals and ambitions whether economic, military, or cultural.”⁵⁵ Defining Canadian national interests for the purposes of this discussion therefore is not easy. In the quest for clarity however, national interests will be defined as ‘issues or principles that are important to the well-being, security or prosperity of the nation.’

Not only is defining national interests a challenge, but as renowned historian Jack Granatstein states, “Canada is a nation that seldom discusses its national interests”.⁵⁶ Despite Granatstein’s assertion that Canada seldom discusses its interests, there is great potential advantage to doing so, particularly in the context of examining significant foreign policy issues such as Canada’s contribution to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, in practical terms, Granatstein’s remarks mean that unlike Canadian values, Canadian national interests are not well catalogued or articulated. Equally, the numerous studies on the subject tend to address common or generic interests that apply to all countries universally. There is also a distracting and often careless misuse of the expression that something is ‘in the national interest’⁵⁷. Neither of these approaches is particularly helpful to this discussion.

The challenge then is to capture and articulate those interests that are most relevant to our examination of Canada’s mission in Afghanistan. In particular, in order to round out the main argument, it is important to make the connection between: sovereignty as a national interest; the level of mutual respect in the Canada - United States relationship; the relative independence of action available to Canada resultant from

⁵³ Concise Oxford Dictionary Online. http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/interest?view=uk (accessed April 3, 2007)

⁵⁴ Thomas-Nelson Political Science resource Centre. <http://polisci.nelson.com/glossary.html> (accessed April 3, 2007)

⁵⁵ Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_interest. (accessed April 3, 2007)

⁵⁶ Grantstein, Jack, *The Importance of being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada’s National Interests Through Tighter Ties with the US.*, Benefactors Lecture, Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute, 2003. p. 7/35 (as reproduced by CFC)

⁵⁷ Macnamara, W.D., and Ann Fitz-Gerald. “A National Security Framework for Canada.” *IRPP — Policy Matters*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (October 2002): p.11

that respect; and the potential exercising of that freedom of action as an expression of sovereignty. Fortunately, Canadian national interests can be distilled down to a handful of commonly accepted principles.

First there is the principle of national unity. Perhaps best articulated by former Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent who in 1947 stated “the first general principle upon which I think we are agreed...is that our external policies shall not destroy our unity.”⁵⁸ As important as this principle is, especially in the Canadian paradigm, it has no direct connection to the examination of Canada’s contribution to Afghanistan. Indirectly however, there is a nexus to national unity that warrants comment. The importance of Quebec public opinion in relation to the Afghanistan mission is significant. Averaging levels of support 10-15% lower than rest of Canada, public support for the mission in Quebec is best described as fragile. This fragility will become even more pronounced in the months ahead as the Quebec-based contingent from ‘5ieme brigade’ including a battle-group composed of the famous ‘Vingt-Deuxieme’ (VanDoos) regiment deploys to Afghanistan. Although it is unlikely this will have a measurable effect on national unity, it will nonetheless be a potential stressor to be monitored.

Another principle that appears common to the study of national interests is the principle of economic prosperity. In this respect, there is a potential connection to Afghanistan. This connection, albeit potentially nebulous, is often argued by many who claim Canadian dependence on the US economy as the primary driver for foreign policy decisions in Ottawa. This argument, as attractive as it may appear to those wishing to suggest that everything occurs in the interests of economics, is over-used and fundamentally flawed. The reality is that the US is as dependent on Canadian imports as Canada is on the US market for exports. The characterization of the economic relationship as symbiotic makes assertions of the so-called ‘vulnerability’ of our exports incongruous.⁵⁹ Economics, despite claims to the contrary, is not a dominant national interest in terms of the Canadian contribution to Afghanistan.

The remaining principle, and the one that has the closest link to the mission in Afghanistan, is national security. There is no denying that national interests are inextricably linked to national security.⁶⁰ This is clearly a principle that, if properly presented, could resonate with most Canadians. With that said however, even ‘security’ has failed to capture the imagination of the average Canadian for the reasons discussed earlier in the context of messaging. The threat of terrorism is still just an abstract concept to many Canadians who fail to embrace the arguments that the mission in Afghanistan is an ‘anti-terrorist’ campaign. The very actions of the government last fall in shifting the public messaging to focus on the humanitarian aspects of the Afghan mission confirm this perspective. Security therefore may not be the primary interest at play, especially in the context of the Canada-US dynamic.

⁵⁸ Mackenzie, Hector. *Defining and Defending a Place in the World: Canada’s Vital Interests in international Affairs*. Canadian Issues. Montreal: September 2002. p.31.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Huertig, Mel in “Canada and the New American Empire” - Edited by Melnyk, George. University of Calgary Press: Calgary. 2004. p. 248.

⁶⁰ Macnamara & Fitzgerald, National Interests, Oct 2002. p.11

Nonetheless, there is a potential linkage to security that warrants further examination; the concept of sovereignty.

Sovereignty as a National Interest

Like the variety of uses of the term ‘national interests’, the word ‘sovereignty’ is employed in multiple applications with multiple meanings. In the Canadian context, sovereignty is often employed in relation to Quebec nationalism as well as the resilience of national boundaries (mostly related to the Arctic). Definitions of sovereignty in its purest form tend more toward the ethereal than the practical. These definitions include “supreme power or authority”⁶¹ and “the exclusive right to exercise supreme political (e.g. legislative, judicial, and/or executive) authority over a geographic region, group of people, or oneself.”⁶² As these definitions are focused more on territorial and legal aspects, they are not particularly suitable to our discussion of interests in the context of Canada’s contribution to Afghanistan. Looking beyond the more obvious references uncovers a broader interpretation of sovereignty that speaks to a level of independence or freedom of action/autonomy.⁶³ This freedom of action, or autonomy, is most appropriate to the ongoing analysis, and is the very sense of sovereignty that will therefore be discussed. Further, this interpretation of sovereignty as independence of action or autonomy can be shown to be ‘a principle that is important to the well-being of the nation’ and therefore consistent with the previously established definition of a national interest. There is an apparent paradox in what is emerging as a theme of ‘independence’ derived from ‘interdependence’, but that is the very essence of the argument being proffered.

Having established sovereignty as freedom of action, the relevance of this interpretation to the Canadian paradigm, especially in the context of the Canada – United States relationship, must now be explored. In addition, the relative importance of sovereignty as a national interest needs to be established. As the discussion of sovereignty continues, it is perhaps useful to consider the notion that just as “sovereignty is an instrument not a goal...instruments are means to an end, not an end in themselves”⁶⁴, so too is ‘freedom of action’, or ‘autonomy’, an instrument that facilitates the achievement of goals. In this context one needs to keep in mind that it is the potential by-products of this freedom of action that matter, and not just the autonomy itself. Sovereignty therefore is important to Canada for what it can do for Canadians not simply because it exists.

⁶¹ Concise Oxford Dictionary Online http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/sovereignty?view=uk (accessed 11 Feb 2007)

⁶² Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty> (accessed 11 Feb 2007)

⁶³ Roget’s Thesaurus (online) <http://thesaurus.reference.com/browse/sovereignty> (accessed 11 February 2007) Roget’s New Millennium™ Thesaurus, First Edition (v 1.3.1) Copyright © 2007 by Lexico Publishing Group, LLC.

⁶⁴ Segal, Hugh. *North American Community: A Prospect to Excite and Inspire*. Inroads Journal, no. 13, Summer/Fall 2003. p.3.

In order to further frame the discussion, sovereignty, as it has been interpreted, needs to be considered as a national interest, especially in relation to other well-established principles. In their study of national interests McNamara and Fitzgerald refer to the Nuercherlein matrix of vital, important, and humanitarian interests.⁶⁵ In line with this hierarchy of relative importance, McNamara would probably rate sovereignty (as it has been interpreted) as ‘important’. Similarly, Rempel, in his book “Dreamland”, employs a comparable ranking of national interests that ranks interests as: Survival/Vital, Major, and Other. Interestingly, Rempel specifically rates threats to sovereignty as ‘vital’⁶⁶. That rating however is perhaps more appropriate to the traditional interpretation of sovereignty – one that implies a sense of physical security - than to the interpretation adopted in this analysis. Nonetheless, irrespective of the ranking system or model adopted, sovereignty rates as an important principle to the well-being of Canada or, in other words, a national interest.

Having presented an interpretation of sovereignty to mean ‘independence or freedom of action’ or ‘autonomy’, and having further established sovereignty as ‘a principle that is important to the well-being of the nation’ and therefore a ‘national interest’, the discussion must now shift to the importance of the Canada – United States relationship as a national interest, and the application of ‘sovereignty’ thereto.

The Canada – United States Relationship

The CAN-US relationship not only fits the definition of a ‘national interest’ as being important to the well being of Canada, but it is also an integral component of this analysis of Canada’s contribution to Afghanistan. Central to this analysis is the notion of Canadian independence of action, meaning ‘sovereignty’, in the context of the CAN-US relationship. This is especially important given the underlying Canadian fondness for independence or autonomy from the US that often dominates the relationship. Fundamentally, this portion of the discussion will explain how and why sovereignty is important to the CAN-US relationship, and why the CAN-US relationship is important to Canada, or, in other words, ‘in the national interest’.

The importance of the CAN-US relationship to Canada cannot be over-stated. Former Canadian Ambassador to the US Allen Gottlieb’s refers to the “paramountcy” of the relationship, particularly in the post-9/11 world. He further suggests that Canada cannot function effectively without being able to influence Washington; equally, Canada’s ability to influence others in the world is affected by the extent to which the US listens to Canada.⁶⁷ Political scientist Hector Mackenzie supports Gottlieb’s perspective on the CAN-US relationship and adds that “Canada’s vital national interests in international relations have increasingly become continental rather than global in scope”...“the over-arching influence (of the US) is unquestionable.”⁶⁸ This is all to say that the CAN-US relationship is a fundamental tenet of Canadian foreign policy that

⁶⁵ Macnamara and Fitzgerald, National Interests (from Seminar Readings), p. 15

⁶⁶ Rempel, Roy. Dreamland. p. 158/159.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Welsh, *opcit*, p. 5

⁶⁸ Makenzie, Hector. *opcit*, p.31

often dominates how Ottawa chooses to act on the world stage. Equally relevant to the discussion as the importance of the relationship itself, are how it functions and the role Canada plays in the relationship.

The CAN-US relationship can perhaps be described as a partnership; in some ways equal, in others lopsided. This characterization as a partnership is useful to the discussion about sovereignty; as in most relationships, the strength of the partnership is reliant upon the independence and strengths of the individual partners. A healthy partnership permits the free and open exchange of potentially conflicting ideas in pursuit of common objectives (or interests). Rempel reinforces this characterization in his remark, “the only way to sustain real independence in North America is to maintain an effective partnership with the US.”⁶⁹ The notion of independence is therefore central to the discussion of sovereignty in the CAN-US relationship. Notwithstanding the numerous historical Canadian successes in such things as the Landmine Treaty, the International Criminal Court, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) initiative at the UN, Rempel laments the recent quality of the relationship and the resultant loss of autonomy for Canada in stating that, “for Canada, the consequence of declining American support has been still-born diplomatic initiatives, declining political leverage where it matters most, and an erosion of national sovereignty.”⁷⁰ These comments encapsulate the essence of the discussion by expressing the critical importance of a healthy CAN-US relationship to the ability of Canada to exercise autonomy.

In terms of how the CAN-US relationship functions, and perhaps even more importantly is seen to function, it depends which side of the partnership one is on. Based on extensive polling, Canadians prefer a ‘cool and business-like’ relationship with the US, and they are willing to accept some problems in order to exercise independence.⁷¹ This underlines the latent quest for autonomy that permeates the Canadian attitude toward the relationship. This approach seems to be rooted in an underlying Canadian desire for defining its identity based on its distinction from the US. The US, on the other hand, seems to take a slightly more pragmatic approach. Although it too is ‘business-like’, the US looks more to Canada as a partner upon whom it wants to be able to depend. As political scientist Joel Sokolsky puts it, “Washington is not looking for advice from Ottawa, it is looking for the assistance it believes it deserves.”⁷² Given these distinctions in perspective, it is worth exploring Canada’s position, and options, in what is clearly a relationship defined by its differences.

The Canadian perspective on the CAN-US relationship seems to be consistent in its quest for independence from the US. In fact, this quest for independence ranks high in terms of things that matter to Canadians.⁷³ This perspective is reinforced in open

⁶⁹ Rempel, Roy. *Dreamland*. p. 5

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁷¹ Munton & Keating, p. 30/33 (as reproduced by CFC)

⁷² Sokolsky, Joel. *Realism Canadian Style: National Security and the Chretien Legacy*. Policy Matters, June 2004. Vol 5, no. 2. p.22

⁷³ Granatstein, Jack., *The Importance of being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada’s National Interests Through Tighter Ties with the US*, Benefactors Lecture, Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute, 2003. (as reproduced by CFC) p. 10/35.

criticisms of a loss of autonomy and respect in the CAN-US relationship. Heurtig, in his recent anti-American work, suggests that Canada seems to have lost its way with a Foreign Affairs Department that long ago forgot the meaning of words like ‘sovereignty’, ‘independence’ and ‘self respect’. He further contends that most Canadians want to be independent of American domination and fortifies his contention with polling results that show two-thirds of Canadians say that maintaining the sovereignty of Canada is the most important challenge facing the country; and further, three in five Canadians say they are losing independence from the United States.⁷⁴ These comments succinctly capture the essence of the Canadian desire for ‘sovereignty’ in the context of the CAN-US relationship. Granatstein further characterizes this ‘sovereignty’ as “the right to say no and the willingness to accept the price of doing so.”⁷⁵ Whether this characterization is agreed by most or not, the common element to all the perspectives on Canadian independence from the US is perhaps best reflected in Ignatieff’s simple yet eloquent view that “you don’t want to be beholden to another country; it is not healthy”.⁷⁶

Clearly, there is no doubt as to the extent to which Canadians see their independence from the US, in other words their ‘sovereignty’, as the defining theme in the CAN-US relationship. The issue comes down to assessing how Canada exerts its autonomy as a ‘partner’ with the US, and ultimately the extent to which the ongoing mission in Afghanistan has bolstered that very ‘sovereignty’.

Sovereignty in Action - The Value of Mutual Respect

In the simplest of terms, Canada exerts its autonomy in CAN-US relationship through respect. This notion of respect, and in particular mutual respect, is an underpinning of a healthy relationship or partnership. Both parties in the partnership need to know that they are being taken seriously. In fact, the partnership itself is defined by the importance of a mutual sense of respect/privilege.⁷⁷ This sense of respect is fundamental to Canada’s ability to exert influence in the CAN-US dynamic and take an independent stand, or even say ‘no’ with confidence as Granatstein suggests. An effective partnership, based on mutual respect, therefore allows Canada to advance its agenda, and perhaps even more importantly, advance its influence.⁷⁸

Key elements of an effective partnership include: faith, mutual respect, understanding, shared decision-making. These attributes are even more important when the relationship is ‘asymmetric’ as in the case of the CAN-US relationship. In such a lopsided relationship there could be a loss of confidence in the smaller state, and the larger state could dominate and control often just ignoring the smaller (weaker) one and

⁷⁴ Heurtig, Mel, *ibid*, p. 246/247.

⁷⁵ Granatstein, Jack. *A friendly Agreement in Advance: Canada-US Defence Relations Past, Present, and Future*. C.D. Howe Institute Commentary, no. 166. June, 2002. p. 16.

⁷⁶ Ignatieff, Michael. *Peace, Order and Good Government*. p. 4

⁷⁷ Burney, D.H., “Canada-US Relations: Promise Pending?” In the Interest? Assessing Canada’s International policy Statement, Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, November 2005, p.12.

⁷⁸ Rempel, Roy. *opcit*. p. 5

acting unilaterally.⁷⁹ It is Canada therefore, as the ‘weak’ state in the partnership, which has the most to gain from earning the respect of the US. For without such respect, as the so-called ‘weak’ partner, Canada loses the ability to act, becomes ignored and marginalized and ultimately compromises its independence of action, or ‘sovereignty’. Simply put, the extent to which Canada enjoys the respect of the US directly affects Canadian sovereignty.

It is readily apparent that Canada’s participation in Afghanistan has earned the accolades and respect of the US. Comments to the effect that Canada is a reliable ally in the US ‘War on Terror’⁸⁰ and that Canada is doing a fine job in Afghanistan are the very expressions of confidence and respect that are indicative of the US desire for Canada to give it the assistance it thinks it deserves.⁸¹ These comments from senior officials in the Washington, and the references to the Canadian contribution and sacrifice in the US media, are all indicative of an enhanced level of respect of the US.

This enhanced level of respect in Washington is directly linked to an enhanced level of independence of action for Canada. Consequently, having established ‘independence of action’ as an interpretation of ‘sovereignty’, it can be further argued that the enhanced levels of respect in Washington as a result of Canada’s contribution to Afghanistan are directly, and positively, affecting Canada’s sovereignty. Looking farther back into the preceding discussion, the established linkage between improved public support for the mission and the government’s emphasis on the positive, humanitarian aspects of the Canadian contribution are most relevant to the chain of argument.

Practical Applications of Sovereignty

The implications of this reinforced sovereignty for Canada are potentially significant, although perhaps not yet fully realized. The increased respect in Washington fundamentally improves Canada’s standing in the CAN-US relationship/partnership and therefore enhances Canada’s ability to act unilaterally on the world stage as Gottlieb suggests.⁸² This, in turn, permits Canada to pursue its own agenda with the understanding that, to the maximum extent possible, it will be doing so as a ‘weaker’ yet ‘respected’ partner of the US. Most encouraging about this situation is that it’s not necessarily about taking an ‘independent’ stand vis-à-vis the United States, but it’s more simply about ensuring Canada maintains the ability to do so if or when it might be required.

Practical examples of the applicability of this independence of action can be found both in the recent past, as well as looking to the not so distant future. It could be argued that the use of historical examples might cause the reader to conclude that such ‘sovereignty’ already existed prior to Canada’s mission in Afghanistan. Although this would be true, it does not take into account that CAN-US relations take place in an open

⁷⁹ Rempel. *ibid.* p.5

⁸⁰ See Condaleeza Rice at Note #48

⁸¹ Sokolsky, Joel. *ibid.* p.22

⁸² See Welsh at note #65

market place in which the actions of the past are often forgotten in the distractions of the present - meaning one can't live on credit for long; or, when the well of goodwill is dried-up it has to be replenished before you can draw from it again. That's exactly what the Afghanistan experience has done for Canada – replenish the well.

Examples of past acts of independence include some fairly significant departures from US actions. The decision by Canada to not participate, even in a token way, in the war in Iraq is a recent example of how Canada exerted its autonomy from the US and, in the words of Grantstein, paid the price for doing so. Although the direct impacts of that decision are difficult to measure, there is no doubt as to the impact on relations between Ottawa and Washington. The decision, although respected only in the strictest terms of a sovereign decision, was neither appreciated nor well received in Washington. It could be argued, in hindsight, that the decisions in fact enhanced Canada's position in the national capitals of the world where the war was opposed; especially in the context of an increasingly unpopular US administration. As interesting or compelling as that argument may be, it is not directly relevant to the issue of the CAN-US relationship.

Further historical examples of Canada's autonomy of action include the position toward relations with Cuba and the Land Mine Treaty mentioned earlier. Both of these brought significant criticism from the US, but were pursued in spite of the potential effects they might have had on CAN-US relations at the time. The ability of these independent actions by Canada to go without significant repercussions speaks not to the benevolence of the US, but rather it is due to the respect afforded Canada by the US. Recognizing the frequently transactional nature of the relationship, and the freshly replenished respect from the contributions to Afghanistan, one can ask what this could mean to Canada in practical terms in the months and years ahead.

Predicting with any certainty the type of situation in which Canada might want to exert its sovereignty and draw from the well of US respect is a mug's game. Nonetheless, there are a few potential issues that might lend themselves to a Canadian position distinct from that of the US. Canada's position on Arctic sovereignty and in particular the status of the North-West Passage is an issue that could potentially strain the CAN-US relationship. Equally, the environment and the adoption of policies to address such things as global warming is another topic in which there is considerable potential for a divergence of approach between Canada and the US. Lastly, although not necessarily a potential area for disagreement, the ongoing issue of securing the CAN-US border, and the related trade issues, is a subject in which Canada may wish, or need, to draw against its credit in the account of respect.

There's never an absolute guarantee that the US will either support or agree with a differing Canadian position on a key issue. Starting any such discussion from a position of respect however is sure to help.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

As the relative recentness and emotional relevance of the 9/11 attacks has waned, the Canadian population has challenged both the motivation behind, and necessity for, the ongoing mission in Afghanistan. These ongoing debates lay in wait for the new Harper government upon assuming power in early 2006. Despite these challenges however, Harper took early ownership of the mission and left no doubt as to where he and his government stood; stressing that the mission was both the right thing to do and in the national interest. The new government appealed directly to Canadians' sense of international obligation and won support for the extension of the mission only a few months after taking power. Unfortunately the summer of 2006 saw significant casualties, and the new government was faced with rapidly declining public support as a result. As is often the case with combat casualties, the Canadian public was measuring the human cost of Canada's participation in Afghanistan, and there was growing concern that the focus of the mission was overly militaristic and that the government was backing a loser; definitive action to turn the tide of public opinion was required.

In direct response to this rapidly declining support, the government acted decisively by changing its messaging in reference to the Afghan mission. The messages shifted toward the humanitarian aspects of the mission in what was a direct appeal to the foundations of traditional Canadian values; good news stories stressing the 'rightness' of the mission became the order of the day. The campaign was successful and polls from late in the fall of 2006 showed a marked increase in public support for the mission. This freshly bolstered public support allowed the government to continue its stalwart commitment to the mission and in so doing averted what could have been a potentially troublesome reduction or withdrawal of the Canadian contribution to ISAF.

The direct results of the shift in public support are difficult to measure. It is nonetheless apparent that, if nothing else, it provided a level of confidence and flexibility with which the government could act. The most important effect of the government's messaging was the positive impact on Canada's reputation as a reliable partner within NATO and in particular with the United States. Effectively, Canada preserved (or more accurately did not squander) the few credits it had built-up after 9/11 and showed the US it was taking its obligations to international security seriously. The resultant effects of Canada's continued support to, and disproportionate sacrifices as part of, the Afghan mission were significant. Key leaders within NATO and in Washington began to take note of Canada's role in Afghanistan; accolades and expressions of respect followed. The measure of effectiveness of Canada's efforts in support of the mission can be demonstrated through the currency of public commentary. From the halls of NATO in Brussels, to the writers at various respected US newspapers, and most importantly the White House, Canada earned considerable recognition and respect.

Notwithstanding the challenges of defining national interests, especially in the context of Canada's contribution to Afghanistan, a definition of a national interest as an 'issue or principle that is important to the well-being, security or prosperity of the nation' was developed and subsequently linked to the concept of sovereignty. In turn,

Sovereignty was defined as a national interest and then further interpreted as independence of action for Canada within the Canada-United States relationship. The value of this independence of action, or sovereignty, was explored in relation to the notion of a partnership with the US; it was further suggested that an effective partnership is highly dependant on mutual respect. This respect, earned in Canada's case though its significant contributions to the Afghan mission, affords Canada a level of independence of action in its relationship with the US. Simply put, the extent to which Canada enjoys the respect of the US directly affects Canadian sovereignty.

In closing, although the actions of the government were not necessarily intended to curry favour in Washington, the end result was exactly that. The Canadian Government's recent values-based communications campaign emphasizing the humanitarian aspects of Canada's ongoing commitment to Afghanistan did in fact bolster public support for the mission, and thereby served the national interest by reinforcing Canadian sovereignty. This perhaps unintended outcome is in fact very much in Canada's national interest as it provides Canadian policy-makers with options for facilitating the pursuit of other national objectives either within the CAN-US relationship or on the broader international stage. As Jack Granatsein states, "it is time for Canadians to recognize that there is no shame in agreeing with the US when its actions accord with our national interests...sovereignty is not necessarily lost by cooperation, and it can even be advanced by it."⁸³

⁸³ Grantstein, Jack, *The Importance of being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada's National Interests Through Tighter Ties with the US*, Benefactors Lecture, Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute, 2003. p. 25/35 (as reproduced by CFC)

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