

Speaking Notes for

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Canada's Place in the World – A Matter of Will

Introduction

As I ponder the events of the past year, I have a sense of anticipation that we, as a nation, may be finally starting to turn the corner on decades of introversion and starting to re-think our place in the world. Authors and commentators, such as Andrew Cohen and Jennifer Welsh, have found resonance with their analysis and ideas. The Federal Government has shown signs of seriousness, with the publishing of a National Security Policy and a budget, which at least on the surface, appears to be committing to a positive change. The Prime Minister has, since assuming office, spoken eloquently on the need for Canada to play a greater and more influential role in the world. And, the much-vaunted International Policy Review continues to hold out promise that by taking an integrated 3D approach of defence, diplomacy and development, we will chart a new course on the global stage.

But, with all of these signs, why am I still uneasy? Why do I have a sense of skepticism? Why does it all not feel right? Perhaps it is the voice of experience whispering in my ear. After all, there is the Canadian propensity for minimum contribution and maximum spin. The reality that, when it comes right down to it, our track record has been that, too often, we don't think the problem through and, in the final analysis, don't deliver. That when the cheque comes, we go to the washroom! Now I may be doing this government a disservice. We may be on the edge of a sea change in Canadian politics. But just in case we aren't, I would like to offer some advice, a cautionary note if you will, to government on the nature of the challenges they face and what I believe will be required to achieve success.

To set the scene let me state up front that I am one who believes Canada can and should play a much greater role in the world. But as a pragmatist I believe that, if the dreams of an influential and constructive role in the world are to be realized, we must face up to some very real challenges.

The need for political will.

First of all, any new direction or initiative requires real political will. Another round of marketing spin will only further erode our falling credibility.

This, to my mind, means that the government must develop a realistic and coherent vision of what it wants to achieve and decide how and where its

involvement will make the greatest difference. Rushing off with a somewhat vague notion of intervening in failed states does not a strategy make and, if not careful, can lead to disastrous outcomes. There must also be something in it for Canada. As much as a principled position in international affairs is important, we have national interests and these should feature high in our international vision.

Developing such a vision will not be easy. We want to make a difference, but where, in a world crying out for support, can our limited resources have the greatest effect? Do we cherry pick nations based on opportunity, or concentrate in certain regions, with the obvious domestic and international political implications? And how does any of this support Canadian interests? I'm not going to try to answer these questions, indeed I'm not sure I have the answers. But clearly the country must answer them if any new initiative is to work.

Developing this vision and sustaining it will require strong political leadership and that means spending political capital. Domestically it means building the support and consensus essential to achieving the required levels of commitment, a serious challenge given the draw of more politically attractive domestic programs. Internationally it demands a greater engagement, through firm and sustained Canadian action, that builds credibility, earns influence and secures the support Canada will need to be successful.

Given our geopolitical position and the changing shape of the global community, I believe this vision must see Canada take a much more independent leadership position. That is not to suggest that we no longer pursue our interests through multi-lateral institutions. However, those institutions are changing rapidly, don't necessarily meet our needs and, despite what governments may claim, provide a voice barely audible around the international table. So only by playing a greater role, where we can have greater influence, can we bring that influence to bear to achieve our goals and interests?

Sadly such a view does not have a large constituency, and many Canadians underestimate what we can do or the importance to our sovereignty of being able to act independently. This nation earned the right to stand on its own at Vimy ridge and through that commitment of blood assured the nation that we would never again be the providers of cannon fodder for other nations.

However, despite our accomplishments in the world wars, we have in recent years fallen back into the convenient niche that sees us doing just that. For with few exceptions, Canada has been more that satisfied with being a bit player on someone else's team. If we want to have influence we must lead.

Perhaps most challenging of all, successful global engagement will require tangible and consistent commitment to building the capacity, as a nation, to achieve the goals envisioned. To my mind this means developing a capability in military, diplomacy and development terms, that will support such a long-term strategy. This means developing the ability to lead.

I am not suggesting we don't have the quality diplomats, military and development leaders to undertake such an initiative. But that isn't enough. We must have the capacity to lead. This means more than high quality commanders and staff, as demonstrated in Afghanistan by General's Hillier and Leslie with their teams. It means we need to have the critical capabilities integral to the government and the CF, which permit us to undertake action, without being reliant on other nations. Obviously that doesn't mean having everything a mission would require, but it does mean have sufficient capability to act, where required, to achieve our aims. To my mind, high on this list is adequate strategic and operational intelligence, essential to providing the knowledge we need, strategic communications to affect global command and control, enhanced logistics to support world wide operations and the strategic lift to ensure a timely response to events.

Some may debate these requirements, but experience has shown that without them we incur major risks, unacceptable when we are carrying a major part of the mission load. In my opinion, our decision to take on the ISAF mission in Afghanistan was one fraught with considerable risk. It wasn't that we couldn't provide the troops, it was that as the lead nation we lacked the key capabilities to ensure that no matter the problems that arose, we had the ability to respond. The African Great Lakes adventure had shown us where our weaknesses were and we had no illusions. Canada should have none if we are to do more.

We also need to have the capacity to stay in a region, if necessary for the long term. Departing a mission or a region after just a few deployments, or even a few years, rarely has a lasting effect. We can dream of an early in – early out strategy, but it is rarely a viable option. So if we want to make a difference we need depth in the organization beyond that currently achieved

or I believe even envisaged. It is a reflection of the state of thinking in this country when we are told that 5000 additional troops will solve the problem and allow us to do much more on the world stage. The facts tell another story.

The reality is that, at a human level, international operations is a demanding, even stressful undertaking and whether you are a soldier, sailor, airman or woman, diplomat or aid worker, you can only take so much. The question, from a governmental perspective is, how much do we expect them to take? How many operational tours for a professional soldier is enough, before he or she no longer has a family or they opt out and we lose all of that valuable experience. If we deploy a soldier on operations for a six month tour every two years, which actually is less than some have been going, by the time we add all the other absences for training etc, he or she is away from home about half the time. So by the time we have a well-trained Sergeant with 20 years service, he or she has over ten years away from the family. For most people it is not sustainable. That may be hard for some to understand or accept but unless we are to move to a Roman army model with permanently stationed forces it is a reality we must face.

And of course there is the need for the nation to be able to operate in the extremes of conflict. This means being trained and equipped to fight, for anyone who thinks that we can take a leadership role without facing real threats is naïve. In many regions of the world, conflict is increasing and if we continue to deploy on such operations, it is only a matter of time before Canadian troops again face major combat, no matter how unpalatable that may be to some.

Finally, the government will require the patience and determination to see the thing through over the long term. Making a difference doesn't come easily and the country will face difficulties and perhaps even failures on the international stage. The government must have the intestinal fortitude to stick with it.

In summary, political will, that assures a coherent vision, provides strong leadership, assures a viable capability and possesses the patience to stay the course, is the essential first ingredient for success.

The need for military will

As much as political will is vital to realizing a global presence, much is also demanded of the military. For as important as the other D's, it is hard power that provides the foundation upon which soft power can make a difference. Here too there is the need for a strong will to make things work.

The CDS treated us to a sense of where he wants to take the CF this morning, but no one should underestimate the challenge he faces.

For far too long the CF has taken a view that the structure of the forces is right, it is just the resourcing levels that are wrong. While not debating the resource needs, 15 years after the end of the cold war, the status quo is not supportable. And the CF can no longer ignore the need for a realistic and focussed look at the nation's requirements for a strategic military capability and to make some tough decisions to shape the force to meet those requirements.

We must recognize that the domestic and continental security requirements must be our top priority and this area will require real investment in the years ahead. However to also maintain a balanced, combat capable, globally deployable Navy, Army and Air Force, as much as we would all like to see it, is not realistic. So the challenge must be to develop a deployable force with capability that can make a real difference. In short we need to think in terms of getting the best national return on our investment.

A re-focussing of the military will require the CF to make tough decisions on what capability it will retain and how the force will be structured. Clearly we could debate the details in a forum like this. But key to such structures is a greater integration or jointness that ensures a more seamless, mutually supportive capability. Something that some have suggested should achieve a capability like a the US Marine Corps.

But it will also require the CF to think outside the box in building new capabilities required for a new role on the world stage. This means accepting risks in order to achieve strategic success. The challenge here is to balance two conflicting requirements. On one hand the investment in new and often expensive technology, essential to maintain even parity on the world stage. On the other, the need for more people to meet the growing capacity demands. I suggest that this first means capitalizing on more capable but cheaper platforms. In the aerospace domain, we need to move into the

unmanned or if you prefer uninhabited Airborne Vehicle. In the short term, principally for surveillance and target acquisition. But in the longer term, even for combat roles. In the maritime domain, a move to smaller, therefore less manpower intensive vessels, but with new capabilities is probably the direction we need to go. And in the land environment a move to fewer multi mission systems. Secondly I suggest that a review of the long term professional structure of the forces is warranted. If we are going to be demanding more operational tours from our people, then we need to find ways of increasing the personnel throughput. We need to explore ideas such as introducing a short term engagement that would see people join, train and undertake a number of operational tours over a three to four year period and then go back to civilian life. This would, amongst other things, keep the force young and provide an opportunity for Canadians to contribute.

Such a change in direction will necessitate a degree of unity across the forces arguably not seen in a long time. Making such decisions has never been easy or particularly effective. It places a great load on the CDS and his leadership team to develop and sell a shared vision of the CF that meets the governments objectives and the long term defence and security needs of the country. However, without the military will to change the culture and build a new kind of capability, the political vision will not be achievable.

The need for corporate will

Notwithstanding the importance of the military contribution to our international role, only by achieving the synergy of a true “Team Canada” approach within the Canadian International community can we have an impact as a nation?

Building the 3-D team and ensuring its operational effectiveness, requires a level of engagement and support across all departments of government. In short there needs to be a high degree of corporate will to realize the vision. This may appear self evident and perhaps considered by some as straight forward once the political direction is clear, but I don’t believe that is so. One cannot over estimate the degree of difficulty involved in getting government bureaucracies to cooperate and achieving a unified approach will take much time and effort.

The greatest challenge to be faced here is in overcoming the parochialism of the various departments and the strong cultures within each of the communities. There are numerous examples of the lack of cooperation

across these departments, as self-interest comes into play. While each may see a broad advantage in cooperating, bridging the differences to achieve trust & understanding will be a difficult, but vital, step if the nation is to be successful.

First steps will need to concentrate on the development of cooperative mechanisms across the Defence, Diplomacy and Development communities. This would include assignment of clear responsibilities to departments, and the establishment of interoperability principles and mechanisms for cross-departmental coordination to oversee 3D initiatives. In the longer term this will need to evolve into a more formal establishment of modalities on interoperability and a written doctrine to guide the operations in the field. After all, waiting until we get on the ground in a country, engaged in a mission to sort out how to work together is very much late to need and does not establish a good foundation for success. Importantly, these cooperative approaches also need to be explored with the vital non-governmental organizations that do so much particularly in the development arena.

Achieving an effective level of capability will ultimately require a new way of looking at the relationship. I believe a coordinated approach to education and professional development, within the various disciplines, is warranted as a long-term means of developing shared values and understanding. Joint or integrated training sessions probably make sense for some missions but participation in military staff courses or the creation of new 3D focussed courses, would go a long way to establish shared perspectives and build the lasting personal relationships, so valuable in ensuring effectiveness.

But more than this we need to build expertise in regions of the world. It is an example of national hubris that we deploy military forces into regions of the world with little understanding or consideration of the local circumstances expecting we know how to solve long-standing problems. The reality is that short intensive courses on local history or culture rarely do more than make us dangerous. The situation may be somewhat better in Foreign Affairs and CIDA but I suspect not much. If we are to spend greater time in these regions, then we need to develop the expertise, including language capabilities, essential for understanding regional issues such that our initiatives make some sense and our missions are established for success.

Beyond the specifics of the 3D's, there is also the need for improvements in the broader corporate structure of government. It is no secret that few in

government, outside of Foreign Affairs, International trade, CIDA and Defence have any real understanding of, or interest in, the world outside of Canada. The effect of this is to view international issues as discretionary which adds increased bureaucratic hurdles to achieving missions. In an age of globalization, and with the country following a much more activist agenda on the world stage, this must change. The government needs to pull together.

The need for National Will

Finally, beyond the political, military and corporate dimensions of the problem, there needs to evolve a national will to fulfill a greater role in the world. In short Canadians need to be convinced. I have often posed the question - what do Canadians stand for? And perhaps more important - what would they fight for? It is easy to default to the skeptical view that says Canadians are not prepared to sacrifice. However, such a view is devoid of context. There is no question that few Canadians would embrace a world role without understanding the why. But, if the cause is just, our history says that the nation will respond.

I believe it is a matter of leadership. It is the responsibility of the leaders in society (political, diplomatic, military, corporate) to develop the vision, but also to provide the leadership that will see the development of a national will. To articulate a positive, unifying vision to the people of this country. Indeed to energize the youth of the nation that they can make a difference.

I have just recently returned from Europe, where I again visited the beaches of Dieppe and Normandy. It made me reflect on what this nation was able to accomplish. A nation less than half the current population and with a fraction of the GDP we have today. Against this backdrop, in a world crying for help, I have to ask, what could Canada achieve today if it really had the will?

Summary

As I ponder all of this my skepticism remains, for one can't help but question our will to face up to these issues and commit for the long term. But, my heart is hopeful; for I truly believe the nation can make a difference. And my head says we must, for only in this way will the world be a place where our children can be safe.