

## STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

*Strategic Forecasting in the Department of National Defence*

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Mr. Pellerin, for that generous introduction. I am honoured to be here with people who care about Canada's security and who know a lot about the defence issues. My mission is to launch your symposium on "The Strategic Assessment". To do so, I will share some of my experience in this area, probably putting more stress on practice than theory but it will hopefully be clear to you that I value the creators of ideas without which there could not be any sound practice. Merci encore une fois pour m'avoir accordé la parole. Je vais y aller en anglais, mais on peut discuter les questions soulevées en français si vous voulez.

We are meeting just after the Remembrance Day. Reflecting on the carnage in the muddy fields of World War I should inspire in all of us a certain humility about the human capacity to predict the future and to control the demons of war. After all, there were confident predictions in 1914 that the boys will be home again "before the autumn leaves fall". Also, some Crown heads of Europe actually wanted a war: what they wanted was "a small war"; what they got instead was a war in which many would lose their crowns, see their Empires collapse, and the Tsar of Russia would pay with his life.

Closer to our time, barely ten years ago (on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1989) the Berlin Wall came down. I believe it fair to say that no mainstream analyst predicted the collapse of the Soviet power in Central Europe and then of the Soviet Union itself. A few writers saw the profoundly inhuman nature of communism, critical inefficiencies of command economy and stresses and contradictions within an Empire many of whose nationalities wanted freedom. Such views did not fit the conventional wisdom - their proponents were dismissed as either disgruntled émigrés or unrepentant right wing ideologues. I say all this to remind us all that thinking about the future is necessary, but it is not easy: when you get it right no one is likely to notice, but when you get it wrong, the failure is likely to be spectacular and long remembered.

*With that as a preamble, I intend to do three things:*

- Touch on the principles of sound strategic assessments;
- Give a couple of examples of what happens in the policy planning process; and
- Just for fun, if time permits or in the Q&A period, sketch out one vision of the future.

*In looking at what is going on in the world and evaluating its likely impact on Canada's interests and values the starting principle has to be "Respect the evidence." To start from the facts is the key to a solid strategic assessment. These facts have to be subjected to rigorous analysis to explain as objectively as possible what is happening and what is likely to happen. Moreover,*

analyst must call the shots as he/she sees them without regard for whether the judgements will support policy-makers' preconceptions and existing policy (sometimes yes; at other times, it gives warning that proposed actions or policies are unlikely to achieve their objectives). In a word, strategic assessment must be *policy-neutral*.

The second attribute of a sound strategic assessment is its "*Awareness of the broad context together with focus on force at the core of strategy.*" What I mean by this rather inelegant phrase is this: to the old Greeks strategy meant "generalship", the general conduct of war. Now the concept of strategy is much broader, indeed, multidimensional: economic, political and psychological factors play a more eminent role; stress is more often placed on peace and conflict prevention rather than war. Although military factor is a significant pillar of national strategy, it is often not necessarily the most important one. But, any analysis of the global situation that dismisses or does not consider carefully 'the threat and use of force' does not deserve the name of strategic assessment and is not going to be *policy-relevant* in the Department of National Defence.

By way of illustration, imagine Somalia in 1992: drought, shortage of food, famine, images of starving children on CNN, tremendous pressure on the politicians "to do something" to prevent a human catastrophe. Hence, humanitarian intervention. Ignore or downplay clan structure of Somalia society, their political conflict - indeed armed violence and use of food as a weapon of war - and you are likely to end up with the mission creep from feeding the hungry to hunting down warlords (especially, Mohamed Aideed) and then American casualties dragged in the streets of Mogadishu followed by a swift withdrawal. This, of course, is a caricature of an assessment but not completely so, as many of the Western commentators did not seem to take indigenous politics seriously enough.

The third principle is what I call "*A feel for the jugular*" that is, what factor out there is likely to be important or even vital. There is no formula prescription here. Each person, based on his/her knowledge and judgement, has to distil analysis to pick out what is significant and to convince "the client" by arguments that it is.

Strategic changes are based on evolution as well as revolution. We should pay attention to both continuity and especially to emerging trends. Most strategic changes are switches in emphasis:

- Deterrence and war fighting;
- Offence and defence;
- Forward defence or expeditionary force;
- Technological edge or quantity;
- Self defence and/or collective security;
- Present power and future capability.

Strategy is not purely a science, it is more of *an art*.

Fourth principle is "*A sense of history*". This is another way of saying awareness of the flow of time, *respect for "The Other"*, respect for culture and values of people different from us. Also, a recognition that historical memories have an enduring impact on the lives of individuals and behaviour of their states. Think, for example, of the conflicts in the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East. They all have deep roots which may not be the sole drivers of violence but which have to be carefully considered. Here, we would do well to follow the advice of Winston Churchill who said that "*The further backward you look the further forward you can see.*" That should be the spirit of the exercise.

The fifth principle is "*Balance*". Are opposing arguments included? Is the picture as complete as possible? Admittedly, balance is partly in the eye of the beholder. Yet I can give you a striking example of an unbalanced assessment. Back in 1991, an important debate was taking place within the Department - specifically, what to do about the fall-out shelters that were designed to preserve continuity of government in the event of a large scale nuclear attack on Canadian territory.

To read the depiction of the potential threat posed by the then Soviet Union as it was presented by those who wanted to keep these shelters, one would think that we were living through the worst tension of the Cold War. More, the authors saw significant near-term threat from dozens of proliferating countries who would successfully develop inter continental ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons within two or three years.

That assessment ignored:

- the fall of the Berlin Wall;
- the unification of Germany;
- the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact;
- landmark nuclear and conventional arms control treaties; and
- increased East-West cooperation with Gorbachev seeking a peaceful way out of the terminal crisis of communism.

So, this clear lack of balance was recognised by all but the most avid proponents. The assessment was obviously slanted toward a pre-determined conclusion. As a means of advocacy, this was not very effective and assessment collapsed of its own weight.

The final principle is perhaps the most important one: "*Independent thinking*". Try to form your own creative ideas, conclusions even if it means challenging entrenched assumptions and conventional wisdom. Misjudgments are ten times better than no judgements. Of course, for such thinking to flourish is not easy. There is also an institutional dimension to this. What ought to be is often not what is. I would say, most of us are uneasy to be constantly challenged and are more

comfortable if our views are supported and reassured. These facts and attitudes have been known to exist. For this reason analysis function within government has to be located such that it cannot be easily manipulated or subverted for policy reasons (... analysts at some step removed from the policy people).

*I gave you a couple of examples of pitfalls. Let me also tell you what happens to solid assessments in the policy process.* Two examples. Both, assessments incorporated a comprehensive array of international factors and purely national considerations such as our fiscal situation and other government priorities. The first example is the September 1991 decision to retain a stationed Task Force in Europe.

Let me take you back ... : The Cold War is over. The Soviet Union is on its last legs. Confrontation in Europe is replaced by an ever-increasing cooperation between East and West. Through a combination of arms control and unilateral measures, the military stand-off is being defused and no longer occupies a central place on the security agenda of European affairs. In pursuit of a coherent post-Cold War defence policy for Canada, the Department of National Defence seeks to gain Government approval to withdraw Canada's contingent of stationed forces from Germany and to close our two bases there.

Our assessment of the situation proves to be accurate and far-sighted: quite an achievement for people accused of being Cold War warriors. But, one department opposes the plan: the Department of External Affairs as it was called then. Our diplomats wish forces to remain in Germany to guarantee continued Canadian involvement in and influence on European affairs. Even at the time, their position was difficult to understand given that NATO-Warsaw questions were no longer important and former Warsaw Pact members were beginning to knock on NATO doors.

To cut a long story short, External's view prevailed and some Canadian Forces stayed in Europe. However, one year later the Government pulled the plug anyway. This episode shows that even good strategic assessment must, occasionally, bow to the interests of other players in the policy-making process. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that high-quality strategic assessment does not guarantee a straight line to the policy outcomes that we might all prefer.

The second example of a balanced strategic assessment that worked much as expected is that which led to the 1994 Defence White Paper. But even here compromises were made and part of the price for fast-tracking this policy document was to delete any specific reference to Russia and China.

*To sum up thus far:*

Analytically sound strategic assessment can and should be a powerful tool in the defence policy and planning process. After all, it is an attempt to present an objective view of what security problems Canada may face in the coming years, and an indicator of what our response should be. While there is no straight line from analysis to policy, chances of avoiding some of the more serious problems and of making the right choices for Canada are improved if analysis is sound.

My main suggestions for those of you who wish to do strategic assessments are:

- Respect the evidence;
- Be broad;
- Be credible (balance, a feel for the strategic and a sense of history); and
- Be bold.

In one sentence, the injunction is: "*Seek certainty and then mistrust it*".

*With that, let us take a shot at the future. Powerful forces of change are transforming the world that we know: they interact and they impact on our individual lives, our societies and our states.*

For the next 25 years and beyond, I see nine major sources of change: the emergence of multiple centres of power, nuclear weapons, demography, environment, technological revolution, globalisation, the revolution in military affairs (RMA), the crisis of identity and governance under stress.

This could be the start of another speech - don't worry, but let me make just a couple of general points.

First, *the structure of world politics*. The United States is and will be the strongest country in the world in every respect, it will likely face increased competition for regional influence from five other centres of power - China, Russia, Europe, Japan and India. These powers differ greatly from one another, they are far from equally strong but the six-sided balance of power that I mention provides one possible glimpse of the future.

Second, *nuclear weapons*. It is true that the fear of nuclear war is less now than at the height of the Cold War. But there are new nuclear dangers. The May 1998 tests in India and Pakistan dramatically changed the global non-proliferation and disarmament picture. North Korea also presents proliferation difficulties. There is now an arc of countries stretching from North Korea to the Persian Gulf that are nuclear or nearly so. Finally, the possibility of nuclear terrorism, the lack of progress on the bilateral US Russia disarmament agenda together with prospective deployment of missile defence systems complicate the picture.

Third, *most of the other factors I listed are double-edged*. For example, take technology. Information revolution and progress in biotechnology are increasing human prosperity, transforming industrial society into knowledge - based ones, helping promote open, democratic, societies and are contributing to global integration and regional stability. On the other hand, globalisation is increasing inequality within and between societies, the resulting, increased frustration of many leads to fragmentation pressures and, of course, diffusion of technology can lead to its military use.

Fourth, *the crisis of identity* is real and we are likely to see more examples of what could be called "new tribalism", the seemingly endless fracturing of states. Indeed, if you look at globalisation and the crisis of identity together what is striking is that the economic organization and the political organisation of the world are at variance with each other. The economic is global, the political is local. Moreover, these forces are at work simultaneously so it is not surprising that their impact varies from region to region.

This leads to the fifth and final point, *governance under stress*. This is related to our diminished capacity to manage the forces of changes, to maintain stability and prosperity. All institutions are under stress, but the weak states are especially vulnerable.

*So what? What is new?* Taken together, these changes imply a lot of uncertainty and fluidity in the international environment. The single most striking feature of the security landscape unfolding before our eyes is thus the diffusion, not the disappearance of threats. This is because we are dealing with the processes of change, not just 'bad actors'. Problems are more complicated and solutions more difficult. But there is also opportunity ahead not just danger. The future is "up for grabs". Adaptation is key to survival.

As we leave the tragic twentieth century behind, it seems that the war and conflicts will not be left behind. Great power war is the least likely, but the most important. No global rival to the US exists and there would be significant warning time, perhaps 10-15 years, before such a threat could be reconstituted. The primacy of economics on the agenda of major powers and the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons also work in favour of peace. But there is a risk of miscalculation, most importantly in the case of Taiwan and Korea.

Regional conflicts like the Persian Gulf War are more probable than world wars. These clashes may have many roots, they could emerge with limited warning and have wide and lasting implications given the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, missiles and advanced conventional arms.

Internal conflicts, are likely to be the prevalent form of conflict. These are "the wars of conscience" to borrow the striking phrase of "The Economist" in contrast to "the wars of interest" described in the two prior categories. Such conflicts may have destabilising regional consequences (Balkans, Congo) and they often generate calls for swift and extensive humanitarian intervention by the international community.

*As for Canada, five sets of policy issues are likely to be prominent on our security agenda.*

*Nuclear stability.* Many analysts see the world as being on the cusp of the second nuclear age. Nuclear tests by India and Pakistan show that not all countries share the view that the value of nuclear weapons is diminishing. While nuclear weapons could arguably induce restraint in conflict situations, conditions for stable nuclear deterrence may not always be present, especially in "rogue-regimes".

Shoring up the nuclear non-proliferation regime, reviving stalled US-Russia nuclear disarmament process, ending nuclear tests and coming to grips with fissile material is

increasingly urgent. Prospective missile defence deployments will also need to be carefully assessed. This is a key policy issue for Canada. Reducing nuclear dangers and ensuring the stability of the international security system remain the ultimate goals.

*Conventional capabilities.* What kind of combat-capable armed forces should Canada have? This question raises many issues given the wide spectrum of potential conflicts, the often dramatic advances in military technology, and the need for the Canadian Forces to remain interoperable with the forces of the United States and those of our European Allies.

*Homeland defence.* A third area of security concerns focuses on what the United States call "Homeland Defence" - the protection of people, property and systems on its territory against non-traditional threats such as terrorism and attacks on the critical infrastructure. The possibility that terrorists will resort to weapons of mass destruction or cyber-terrorism is real, but perceptions differ as to the likelihood. Whatever the case, efforts to reduce vulnerability to such attacks will be of continued concern on both sides of the Canada-US border.

*The dilemmas of intervention.* The issue of military intervention is and will likely remain on the international agenda. UN humanitarian intervention in Iraq in 1991 challenged the traditional concept of sovereignty, and UN-sponsored actions in Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti followed in its wake. This year we saw NATO's air action in Kosovo and the United Nations intervention in East Timor.

In all these cases, intervention posed a whole set of moral, legal, as well as practical questions, not the least of which concerns the increasingly high cost for the developed states of the use of force. These questions should be debated.

The last issue is a question: "*Beyond force?*". It is my way of touching on the Canadian concept of Human Security that is much in the news. It is a concept that stresses individual security not that of states. It recognizes that security rests on a wider base than force and that conditions for peace have to be built when the fires of conflict have been extinguished. These conditions include many things, for example, education especially for girls. In short, Human Security involves much more than the military but military forces have a key role in ensuring basic security that allows everything else to happen.

This vision of the future concludes my presentation. I'll be pleased to answer your questions.