

IF QUEBEC BECOMES INDEPENDENT

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If Quebec becomes independent, Canada undoubtedly would be a geographically awkward country. So the idea cannot be dismissed out of hand that, in the long run, Canada without Quebec would divide into further fragments. Yet it seems equally likely that it would hold together as one country. At the very least, the large majority of English Canadians simply do not want to become Americans, and holding Canada together would remain the best way to accomplish this. In fact, the history of Canada is a history of not wanting to become American.

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Beyond this, it simply is not the case that the only thing that distinguishes Canada

from the United States is Quebec. There are values that constitute the basis of a national culture, and that English Canadians want to protect. Perhaps Americans can be forgiven for overlooking this, for even two Canadian prime ministers, Jean Chrétien and Brian Mulroney, both notably from Quebec, have implied that Canada does not exist without Quebec.

To be sure, English Canadians tend to spend a good deal of time agonizing over their national identity. Yet any American who travels across the Canadian border notices not only the similarities with his own country, but the sometimes striking differences as well. Briefly put, English Canada, across its geographically far-flung parts, is a more organized, calmer, less individualistic, and less violent place than the United States, although at the same time it is less economically, socially, and culturally dynamic.

Many English Canadians have, in effect, been saying to Quebec that they like the country the way it is and are not prepared to constitutionally turn it inside out to accommodate Quebec. In other words, Quebec nationalism has been encountering English Canadian nationalism. This latter nationalism could very well be the glue that holds Canada together in the long run, despite the trauma of Quebec's leaving and the geographic awkwardness of what would remain.

THE FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES

Regardless of Canada's long-term future, there is very little reason to believe that English Canada would divide into

several pieces in the short run, i.e., soon after Quebec's departure. So the foreign policy challenges facing the United States across its northern border on the eve of Quebec independence, and for years thereafter, would be determining and pursuing the kind of relationship it would want to have with Canada and Quebec, and the kind of relationship it would want to encourage Canada and Quebec to have with one another. In the longer run, should any tendencies toward further fragmentation begin to appear in Canada, it would be in the interest of the United States to discourage them, in favour of stable, well-known, and established North American partnerships.

Official American policy concerning the possibility of Canada's breaking up has largely remained constant since the Carter administration, although it was significantly altered, in part, by the Clinton administration during the lead-up to the 1995 Quebec independence referendum. The policy has consisted, in essence, of a firm determination to stay out of the debate in Quebec and the rest of Canada. In form, it has consisted of two elements. The first has been a carefully phrased, formulaic public statement, often called in the State Department the "mantra", the exact wording of which has changed over time. A recent version has run, "The United States enjoys excellent relations with a strong and united Canada. Canada's future is naturally for Canadians to decide." The second element has been a refusal on the part of American officialdom to enter into hypothetical discussions of how the United States would react if Quebec moved decisively to-

ward independence or actually became sovereign.

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Clinton administration officials altered the United States government's public pronouncements in reactions to assertions made in 1994 and 1995 by Parti Québécois leaders to the effect that Quebec "automatically" would enter into several important international agreements, the NAFTA among them. Such an interpretation of the NAFTA is not at all shared in Washington, especially not in Congress. Serving American officials, constrained by the mantra, could not at first openly respond. Nonetheless, they soon hit upon the formulation, used by then-Ambassador Blanchard and Secretary of State Warren Christopher that "no assurances" had been given the Quebec government about the nature of future ties with the United States.

The long-standing United States policy, as modified by the Clinton administration, continues to make sense. Above all, Canada is a democratic country that has the right to decide its own future without the interference of the

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American government.

But there is another important reason to continue with the current official policy of staying out of the debate in Canada. There is inherent tension between the interests of the United States before Quebec becomes independent (should that ever occur) and thereafter. As a result, the

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THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES

It is clearly in the interest of the United States that Canada remain united. Canada purchases more American exports than any other country and is the most important location of American foreign investment. It is (more or less) a single economy and market, under the authority (again, more or less) of one federal government. The division of that economy between several sov-

ereign states can only create new uncertainties and risks for Americans. Since Americans also hold a significant amount of the debt incurred by the Canadian federal and provincial governments, here, too, the country's breakup could only lead to unhappy uncertainties.

During the first few decades of the Cold War, Canadian territory and airspace played an essential role in the defense of North America. Changes in military technology and the end of the Cold War have, in essence, ended this role. So Quebec independence would pose no fundamental security threat to the United States. Still, there would be aspects of the vestigial North American defense tasks which the United States would much rather not have to renegotiate. Moreover, a Canada that had lost with Quebec independence a substantial portion of its population and GDP would have trouble playing a major, constructive role in world affairs.

In addition to economic and military ties, Canada and the United States share responsibility for the protection of the North American environment. Several environmental agreements between them would have to be adjusted. So would a host of other functional agreements between the two countries, involving (to name just a few areas) taxation, transportation, law enforcement, agriculture, health, and pensions. According to Ottawa's count, there are 220 treaties and other accords between our two countries.

Nonetheless, it would be in the interest of the United States, if Canada did in fact break up, to pursue close rela-

tions with both Canada and Quebec, as well as for Canada and Quebec themselves to establish as close a relationship as possible. Faced with an irrevocable Canadian breakup, the United States would have every incentive to continue to pursue the free flow of goods, capital, and services in North America, and to put into place or maintain the arrangements necessary between it and the countries to its north.

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This would include admitting Quebec to the NAFTA. To the extent that the current Canadian economic "space" could be retained by Canadians and Quebeckers, the United States would also benefit. The United States would also have every incentive to foster Quebec's participation in North American security and world affairs, and to enter into discussions with Canada and Quebec providing for the continuity of that host of other North American transborder arrangements.

In other words, Americans, including officials of the United States government, have to hope fervently that the Canadian federalist cause will prevail. But if it does not, the arguments of the Quebec separatists for the establishment of close Canada-Quebec-United States relations should become convincing from the American point of view.

Quebec would be eager for close relations with the United States and Canada. As a result, the most problematic aspect of Quebec independence for the United States could very well be convincing English Canadians—who would be angry at the breakup of their country—of the benefits of close Canada-Quebec economic ties within a broader North American framework.

MAJOR DECISION AREAS

If the Quebec electorate does vote "Yes" in the next independence referendum that is expected within the next several years, the policy of non-involvement that has served the United States government so well for twenty years would have to be abandoned. Some of the major decision areas would be:


The administration might face the immediate and potentially very thorny decision of how to respond to a unilateral declaration of independence issued by Quebec, in violation of the Constitution of Canada and over the formal objections of the Government of Canada. The ramifications could extend beyond North America if (as hoped for by Quebec sovereigntists) swift recognition were granted by France and pressure exerted by the French government on other

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THE PRICE OF INDEPENDENCE *from page 23*

1988	Estonia	USSR	Claim suppressed by Soviets
1988	Rotuma Island	Fiji	Suppressed with no loss of life
1988	Nagorno-Karabakh	Azerbaijan	Successful due to Armenian aid
1990	Army Mutineers	Philippines	Failed
1990	Gagauz Turks	Moldovan SSR	Claim suppressed by Soviets
1990	South Ossetia	Georgian SSR	Successful due to Russian aid
1990	Lithuania	USSR	Claim suppressed by Soviets
1990	Latvia	USSR	Claim suppressed by Soviets
1990	Kosovo	Yugoslavia	Claim suppressed by Serbs
1990	Slovenia	Yugoslavia	Successful
1990	East Bank Slavs	Moldovan SSR	Successful, but status unresolved
1990	Abkhazian Muslims	Georgian SSR	Successful, with Russian aid
1991	Croatia	Yugoslavia	Successful—followed by civil war
1991	Macedonia	Yugoslavia	Uncontested due to rapid UN response
1992	Russians in Crimea	Ukraine	Status unresolved, no real violence so far
1992	Slovakia	Czechoslovakia	Uncontested
1992	British Somalia	Somalia	Successful—status unrecognized
1992	Bosnia	Yugoslavia	Uncontested—160,000 dead in civil war
1992	Chechnya	Russia	Unresolved—80,000 dead
1994	South Yemen	Yemen	Failed

Sources: The *London Times*, R.E. Dupuy & T.N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History*, 4th ed. (Harper Collins, 1993); author's own files.

Norway and Slovakia. to imply that any possible Quebec secession could be entirely peaceful too. The argument is fatuous. A nationalist crisis is invariably charged with emotion, and violence does not need deliberate political instigation to appear. As hundreds of examples around the world illustrate, conflict can be readily initiated by non-state actors. Canadians like to believe (without real evidence) that they are a peaceful and rational people, but a unilateral declaration of independence in Quebec could very well shatter that belief. 

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AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE

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countries of the European Union to recognize the Quebec declaration.


The administration and Congress would have to determine the terms under which, from the American point of view, Quebec would be admitted to the NAFTA and other economic accords. Several matters would have to be negotiated with Quebec in such areas as agriculture, textiles, and cultural industries.

Quebec's departure from Canada would probably precipitate an overhaul of the institutions of Canada-United States defense cooperation, probably leading to less formal arrangements. It is espe-

cially doubtful that the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) would continue. The United States would want to lend its support to immediate Quebec membership in NATO, except in the unlikely event the issue became heavily entangled with that of NATO membership for Eastern European states.

Finally, it bears repeating that the most difficult issue for the United States, should Quebec become independent, could very well be deciding how much it should attempt to encourage Canada to enter into a close relationship with Quebec, especially into an economic relationship within

a broader framework of North American ties.

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