

Notes for a Presentation

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Outline/Introduction

I have been asked to discuss with you my “take” on the significance for Canada of the election of President-elect (for one more day) Barack Obama .

More specifically, I have been asked to respond to a number of questions about the President-elect, viz.,

- What will Barack Obama’s Presidency of the United States probably mean for Canada in terms of trade, continental security, shared global priorities, resource policy?
- Did the global influence of the US shift significantly and permanently during the past presidency, or will the new team be able to restore US influence? (Military, diplomatic, financial)
- What will the impact of Hillary Clinton be on the way the US conducts diplomacy?
- Will there be a markedly different US attitude towards the UN and other international bodies?
- Are there elements of US foreign policy that stay relatively constant no matter who controls the presidency and Congress?

To respond fully to these questions would probably require a book, and certainly take a lot more time than the 90 minutes allotted.

What follows, therefore, is a relatively broad-brush exposition, substantiated where appropriate with facts and quotations, together with an analysis of specific issues of interest to Canada.

In the course of presentation, I will respond to the questions, but I will deal first with President-elect Obama and the US and the world and then, within that context, with the US and Canada.

Obama the Man

First, some insights into Obama, himself.

Obama is the most cosmopolitan President ever elected in the United States.

He was famously born of a Kenyan father; he still has family in that country.

His American mother made a career working with NGO's abroad; micro-finance programs were apparently of particular interest to her.

His early childhood years were spent in Indonesia, where he attended an Indonesian school for four years, with Indonesian, Muslim children.

He went to high school in offshore Hawaii, the most multicultural state in the US, one that is neither mainland nor mainstream.

As he told Agence France Press a year ago, "If you don't understand these cultures then it's very hard for you to make good foreign policy decisions.

Foreign policy is all about judgment...

The benefit of my life of having both lived overseas and traveled overseas ... is, I have a better sense of how [people] are thinking and what their society is really like,

[My] knowledge about foreign affairs isn't just what I studied in school -- I studied international relations when I was in college -- it's not just the work I do on the Senate foreign relations committee.

It's actually having the knowledge of how ordinary people in these other countries live."

It is instructive to compare this background to that of Senator McCain's.

Senator McCain is the grandson and son of admirals.

A graduate of Annapolis Naval Academy (graduating infamously 894th out of 899 in his class—there is hope for us all!)

A naval veteran and prisoner of war in Vietnam

Chairman of the Senate Armed Services committee.

Senator McCain's worldview is near exclusively one of allies and enemies, of threats and dangers, of power and national security.

In important respects, McCain is the embodiment of the militarization of American foreign policy that has developed since the nadir of Vietnam.

Then, the US military brass was reviled.

Now, rare is the politician who does not think it advisable to salute the military, literally and figuratively.

Had he been elected, he would have been more commander-in-chief than President.

Obama, in sharp contrast, has no military experience.

But, he is that very rare American who knows the world from profound, first-hand personal experience and can see the United States as others see it.

The US and the World

How do others see the US?

According to the Pew Research Center's Pew Global Attitudes Project, the US's 's image deficit is the central, unmistakable finding from surveys conducted over the course of this decade.

Since 2002, interviewers have polled over 175,000 people in 54 nations and the Palestinian territories.

The American image abroad is suffering almost everywhere, particularly in the most economically developed countries, where people blame the US, among other things, for the financial crisis.

Opposition to key elements of American foreign policy is widespread in Western Europe, and positive views of the U.S. have declined steeply among many of America's longtime European allies.

In Muslim nations, the wars in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq have driven negative ratings nearly off the charts.

For example, in NATO ally Turkey, support for the US has dropped to single digits.

The United States earns positive ratings in several Asian and Latin American nations, but usually by declining margins.

And while the most recent Pew Global Attitudes survey finds that favorable views of America edged up in 2008, only in sub-Saharan Africa does America score uniformly favorable marks.

These results are derived from polls since 2000.

They are powerful evidence of the damage George Bush has wrought.

No wonder there are debates whether he really is the worst President in recent history, or maybe just in all history, the legacy-saving propaganda notwithstanding.

Obama is what a changing world believes it needs.

All 22 countries in a BBC World Service poll released in September preferred Barack Obama to John McCain.

Forty-six per cent of those polled thought that US relations with the world would get better with Obama, 22 per cent thought that relations would stay the same, and 7 per cent thought that they would get worse.

The most optimistic western country was Canada at 69%, followed by France (62%), Germany (61%), United Kingdom (54%), Italy (64%) - as well as Australia (62%)

Kenya at 87% led all.

In an IPSOS Reid poll released today, 81 per cent of Canadians believe Obama will improve the U.S. image around the world.

Seventy-six (76) per cent of Canadians believe Mr. Obama's election is good thing and an overwhelming 86 per cent said his presidency "brings hope for the future."

Americans, too, remain very happy with their choice

According to the US-based Pew research Centers released January 15, fully 79% of Americans - including 59% of Republicans - say they have a favorable impression of Obama.

Large majorities have confidence in Obama's judgment on the big issues, including 75% who say they have confidence in Obama to fix the economy.

Many other polls found comparable results.

Whether that confidence is justified only time will tell.

FDR possibly excluded, no US President has come to office since Lincoln facing so many intractable problems

—two wars, (Iraq, Afghanistan), the economic recession/depression, the Gaza crisis, climate change, international terrorism and a faltering arms control and disarmament regime.

His two great gifts, his worldliness and his ability to inspire confidence in America, will be severely tested.

Americans and foreigners alike are hugely, almost certainly over, invested in him, and his capacity to satisfy expectations will inevitably disappoint some, perhaps many.

At home, much of his task is, as Roosevelt's was, psychological.

He will need to manage the interplay of hope and hard reality mixed with unanticipated events, encouraging the former and surmounting the latter.

He has clearly begun to try to do so, and his inauguration statement will likely continue the effort.

Abroad, for most of the world, the point of the inauguration will not be the specifics of what he says but the picture of an African-American being sworn in to lead the most powerful country on earth.

His eloquence, his “cool”, his intellect add to the perception of change, and to the expectations for improvement.

President Bush dug the US into a very deep hole in world opinion; Obama should be able to help the US climb back out, if he delivers on some of the change he has promised.

Obama is arguably a man of his times and, the world hopes, for his times.

And, to paraphrase Bob Dylan, “[those] times they are a-changin’.”

The short era of a single superpower is passing into history, replaced by a multi-power world.

Most of the change is being driven by Asia.

We in the West forget all too easily, if we ever really knew, that China and India not being major powers is the exception in history, not the norm.

But, now the Asians are back.

The Asians, according to my former Singaporean colleague at the UN, Kishore Mahbubani, have long been regarded as just consumers of world history,

reacting tactically and, with the obvious exception of Japan, defensively to the surges of Western commerce, power and thought.

But, now the Asians are again producing history as they did for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West.

Consider this quote from Mr. Mahbubani’s new book”

“They called it the Industrial Revolution because, for the first time in all of human history, standards of living rose at a rate where there were noticeable changes within a human life span – changes of perhaps 50 percent.

At current growth rates in Asia standards of living may rise 100 fold, or 10,000 percent (!), within a human life span.”

China, Japan and India currently rank 2nd, 3rd and 4th in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product at Purchasing Power Parity.

Japan, with a population of 128 million, 10th in the world, ranks 2nd in GDP, at market rates.

Japan and China rank first and second, respectively, as major foreign holders of US Treasuries, not an insignificant fact in the current global financial crisis.

The Asians, particularly China, are still coming to grips with their responsibilities as world powers.

China’s Middle Kingdom legacy is a dubious preparation for global leadership but the Chinese are fast learners, as we have seen at the Beijing Olympics!

And China’s behaviour has been responsible in face of the credit markets tightening world-wide.

Russia is “back”, thanks to until lately favourable commodity prices, especially gas, and its own creation of democratic autocracy, that so far delivers legitimacy through rising standards of living.

Russia’s economy ranks 10th in the world, just behind Canada’s in GDP terms.

Russia’s military, with in excess of 14,000 nuclear warheads, remains the second most powerful in the world.

Russia has a major economic interest in a cohesive world order.

But, as events in Georgia showed , Russia intends neither to be taken for granted nor dominated.

Nor as the European gas crisis illustrate, is Russia afraid to use its muscle.

Even Africa, which from piracy to HIV-AIDS to genocide has generated such shocking headlines, has quietly been making progress on democracy, education and health standards.

It has averaged GDP growth of nearly six percent several years running.

Latin America, long a continent apart in political terms and economically, is demanding and getting seats at the top tables, such as the Doha Round, the Climate Change process, and, increasingly, the UN Security Council and now the G20.

Nor should we underestimate the European Union, with a combined GDP of almost \$17 trillion, two nuclear-weapons states, \$256 billion in military spending, and 75% of total aid transfers to poorer countries.

The US will remain the pivot of the international system for a long time to come--fortunately.

American culture will remain pervasive.

American science, especially medical science, will lead the world.

American universities will continue to set international standards for their excellence.

The American economy seems likely eventually once again to generate great wealth for its people, and for its trading partners, despite the current crisis.

And the US military will remain without peer in terms of sheer hard power.

But the take-away point is that American dominance will diminish as other powers rise.

And that, as a consequence, a more cooperative approach will be necessary for effective global governance.

This new world will not be dominated; it will have to be managed, cooperatively.

Diplomacy will be in demand as it has not been since 1945, or perhaps 1919.

While President Obama will present a strikingly different face of the United States to the rest of the world, how different his actual foreign policy will be remains unclear.

On the one hand, Obama has stressed the importance of multilateralism and re-engagement with the world, including Iran, Cuba, and North Korea.

Mrs. Clinton in her confirmation hearing said, “the clear lesson of the last 20 years is that we must both combat the threats and seize the opportunities of our interdependence, and to be effective in doing so, we must build a world with more partners and fewer adversaries.

America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America.

The best way to advance America's interests in reducing global threats and seizing global opportunities is to design and implement global solutions.

That isn't a philosophical point.

This is our reality...

Our security, our vitality, and our ability to lead in today's world oblige us to recognize the overwhelming facts of our interdependence.

... American leadership has been wanting, but is still wanted. We must use what has been called “smart power,” the full range of tools at our disposal.

Smart power is a variant of “Soft Power” the term coined by Joe Nye, former US Secretary of Defense, meaning the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion.

On the other hand, many of Obama’s advisers are drawn from the administration of President Bill Clinton, including Secretary Clinton herself, Susan Rice, James Steinberg, and, probably Richard Holbrooke, among many others.

Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuelle, a dual US-Israeli citizen and veteran of the Israeli Defence Force, worked in the Clinton White House.

Clinton’s liberal interventionism and his reluctance to press Israel had much in common with what followed under Bush.

Nevertheless, I think we will see a change both in style and in substance on the major issues in American foreign policy.

Foreign Policy Specifics

In the time remaining, I will address myself to a few US policy issues, domestic, international and bilateral, that are particularly important to Canada.

The silence the Obama team has maintained on foreign policy since the election has been broken only by Mrs. Clinton's confirmation hearings testimony.

Assessing where they might feel they need to adjust to the realities of power is difficult at this stage.

Still, Mrs. Clinton's testimony broadly but perhaps not fully confirms what was said during the campaigns.

As a basic proposition, Mrs. Clinton said that the Obama Administration believes strongly that the US needs to invest in the capacity to conduct vigorous American diplomacy, provide the kind of foreign assistance the situation requires, reach out to the world, and operate effectively alongside the military.

This sounds very familiar in Ottawa; the challenges are near identical, although the scale is very different.

One of her first priorities is to make sure that the State Department and USAID have the resources they need.

By the way this follows Secretary Rice's success in delivering a very large resource increase to State.

On arguably the most consequential issue facing the new Administration, in terms of its impact on US standing around the world, the Israeli-Arab conflict, President-elect Obama has already dug his own hole.

That conflict is one of the principal yardsticks by which 1.2 billion Moslems, and many others, judge United States foreign policy.

It is a major cause of the sympathy for or, at least, the indifference to, Islamist terrorism vis-à-vis the United States.

Obama's appointment of the staunchly pro-Israel Hillary Clinton to Secretary of State suggests that there may be little change in US administration posture.

Last Spring, at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference, Obama declared that "Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided," going further even than President Bush had done.

He subsequently issued a clarification, but some damage undoubtedly was done.

And, his willingness for his administration to speak with adversary states notwithstanding, Hamas remains taboo.

He is on record as saying that "We should only sit down with Hamas if they renounce terrorism, recognize Israel's right to exist and abide by past agreements,"

He has promised to appoint a special representative for the Arab-Israeli issue and to re-engage from day one: "On January 20th you will be hearing directly from me and my opinions on this issue."

But his past statements and his near total silence as the death toll climbed past 1,000 Palestinian deaths in Gaza in the past few days, even as UN schools came under attack, has already put him in a hole in regional public opinion.

None of this contradicts the Canadian Government's pro-Israel posture, but it does hold the potential for ongoing, possibly enlarging, trouble and should worry Canadians concerned about the public peace in this country and their safety abroad.

On Iraq, President-elect Obama has promised a phased, responsible withdrawal of all combat forces within 16 months.

But it is not clear what the caveats mean exactly, and how "combat forces" will be defined.

Some estimates are that as much as 50% of American forces will remain in Iraq.

Afghanistan could become a difficult policy challenge for the Canadian Government, which has said that Canada will have done its bit by 2011, apparently even if the larger mission is not accomplished by then.

According to Secretary State Clinton's testimony last week, [an Afghanistan] policy review... is the highest priority of the president-elect. [Obama] has put forth what he calls the "more for more" strategy. That's if there are to be more troops from the United States, there also needs to be more support for that mission from NATO...

And I would add that the "more for more" strategy is not just on the military side, it's on the civilian and development side, as well.

New Cabinet-rank UN Ambassador Susan Rice told the CBC last August that despite Canada's pledge to end combat operations in 2011, [the] Obama administration would ask that Canada "continue its contribution."

She made clear she meant combat operations

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has called the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan "outstanding partners" and said that "the longer we can have Canadian soldiers as our partners, the better it is".

The new Administration seems very well aware that Afghanistan is part of a larger security problem in South Asia.

The president-elect has said, "[the US will] increase nonmilitary aid to Pakistan and hold them accountable for security in the border region with Afghanistan".

"And if we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable or unwilling to take them out, then I think that we have to act and we will take them out

Killing bin Laden and crushing Al Qaida is the US's "biggest national security priority."

Were Pakistan to be destabilized in the process, the consequences for the success of our mission in Afghanistan could be fatally, literally and figuratively, prejudiced.

As could be the democratic future of this nuclear-armed state.

On Iran, the US goal is to pursue, through diplomacy, the use of sanctions and better coalitions to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon power.

According to Mrs. Clinton, the US is [not] taking any option off the table ... but ... will pursue a new, perhaps different approach" of engagement.

On Human Security, notably with respect to Darfur and Africa, according to Clyde Sanger in the New York Times last month, President-elect Obama has signaled his intention to engage in preventing conflicts and rebuilding failed states.

According to Susan Rice, "Barack Obama is...committed to helping to end the genocide in Darfur...through tougher sanctions combined with real assistance to help the UN-African Union peace-keeping force stand-up and protect civilians ..."

The President-elect himself said, "We can't say, 'Never again', and then allow it to happen again, and as president of the United States I don't intend to abandon people or turn a blind eye to slaughter."

That sounds a lot like the Responsibility to Protect, a product of Canada's human security agenda, which has been deliberately expunged from official Ottawa's vocabulary.

It will not seem inappropriate to Americans like Ms. Rice to ask Canada to put its money where its mouth was on R2P.

In any case, it seems likely that Africa will loom larger on the Canadian foreign policy agenda than it does now, which ought to occasion some reflection in Ottawa.

Gitmo's days are numbered.

The President-elect is expected to order tomorrow that the Pentagon start the process of closing the Guantanamo military prison, which could take a few months.

According to the New York Times, transition officials appear committed to ordering an immediate suspension of the Bush administration's military commissions system for trying detainees.

It would be ironic if the US Administration asked Canada to take Omar Khadr back.

Also, if Khadr eventually faced a regular US court and was acquitted, given the less than airtight case against him, Canadian Government truculence in this case would require a lot of explaining.

It is evident that the Obama administration will actively try to restore the nuclear arms control and disarmament regime that has been so incautiously undermined by its predecessor.

Obama has said that "the United States must play a leadership role in reducing the roles and risks of nuclear weapons around the world.

Every president has affirmed the long-term goal of achieving a world free of all nuclear weapons - and this remains an important goal as George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn recently reiterated....

As president, he said he would work with Russia to update and scale back [their respective] dangerously outdated Cold War nuclear postures and deemphasize the role of nuclear weapons.

According to Mrs. Clinton, the US will seek agreements with Russia to secure further reductions in weapons under START, work toward ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and dedicate efforts to revive negotiations on a verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty.

These are all policy postures Canadian Governments should be able to welcome.

In fact, they offer the possibility of initiatives that we might take that would be welcome in Washington.

On the UN, US policy under Obama can be expected to be dispense with the hostility manifested by the US under Bush/Cheney.

At his public introduction of his national security team, including new cabinet-rank UN Ambassador Rice, he said that “the UN is an indispensable -- and imperfect -- forum.

“[Ambassador Rice] will carry the message that our commitment to multilateral action must be coupled with a commitment to reform.

We need the UN to be more effective as a venue for collective action -- against terror and proliferation; climate change and genocide; poverty and disease.”

Climate change will be a priority of the Administration and an important intersection with Canada.

Obama is committed to enacting a cap-and-trade system that it is hoped will dramatically reduce carbon emissions, and to freeing the US from its dependence on insecure foreign oil.

The Harper Government has suggested a bilateral deal, a potentially astute move.

For it to work, the deal would have to be consistent with the larger global effort, including probably using the same 1990 baseline as everyone else is.

It will backfire if it is seen as a means of shielding Canada from the unwanted attentions of Congressman Waxman and the Energy and Environment Committee of the US House of Representatives.

In any case, the President-elect has vowed to press ahead with his energy plans as part of his proposed fiscal stimulus, promising to create millions of “green-collar” jobs by doubling production of alternative fuels within three years.

Mrs. Clinton said in her testimony that the US will participate in the upcoming UN Copenhagen climate conference and will cooperate in the international attempt to craft a climate change agreement that all major nations must be part of.

It is an encouraging, if vague, commitment that affords the new administration considerable leeway.

Energy Secretary-designate and Nobel Laureate Stephen Chu has spelled out his support for compulsory measures to cap carbon emissions, arguing that a combination of fiscal policies and regulations is necessary, and the scope has to be international.

US policy on NAFTA could potentially be a problem, but probably not a big one.

Senator Obama said during last February's primaries that the US "should use the hammer of a potential opt-out as leverage to ensure that we actually get labor and environmental standards that are enforced."

Since then the issue has been quiescent.

American officials are aware that even opening NAFTA up to renegotiate labor and environmental standards carries the risk that Canada could seize the opportunity to renegotiate provisions on energy, and other issues, such as dispute settlement.

Mr. Obama's union supporters have not put changing NAFTA at the top of their agenda, focusing instead on issues such as China's manipulable exchange rate.

Time will tell, but with so many more pressing things on its agenda, the administration seems unlikely to pursue this issue aggressively.

The Arctic was raised by Senator Frank Murkowski of Alaska at Mrs. Clinton's confirmation hearing.

Mrs. Clinton saw the Arctic as one of those areas that offers a chance for cooperation that might lead not only to positive actions with respect to the Arctic, but, in her words, "deepen US partnerships with Russia and others across the board."

It is evident that we will need to impress on her that we have interests up there too.

She is on record as saying that disputes over energy resources and minerals and other natural resources in the Arctic would be more easily resolved if the US

ratified the Law of the Sea. "Ratifying the Treaty, which is supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, environmental, energy, and business interests will be a priority for the incoming administration."

Last, but hopefully not least, both the President elect and the Secretary of State designate both recognize relations with Canada matter to the US.

Mr. Obama will come to Canada shortly, in keeping with the less than invariable tradition of US Presidents paying their first foreign visits to Canada.

Mrs. Clinton mentioned Canada directly if briefly in her testimony; no one asked her questions.

On borders, it is evident that this administration like its predecessor will be more concerned about the Mexican border than the Canadian border.

At the same time, Mrs. Clinton's long reluctance to accept that the 9/11 terrorists did not come from Canada is not encouraging.

A Democratic administration will likely be chary of undoing security measures taken by its Republican predecessor.

If we want to reverse the thickening of the US-Canada border brought about by the Bush Administration, it will be up to us to supply the compelling ideas.

We will, though, have a Homeland Security Secretary who will be more open to ideas than Secretary Chernoff was.

The incoming Homeland Security secretary, former Governor of Arizona, Janet Napolitano, has said little directly relevant to Canada since her nomination.

But she visited Ottawa a year ago where she apparently discussed with PM Harper means of relief from the strictures of the US Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative and suggested the creation of a trilateral centre of excellence on border management.

Conclusion

I think it follows from the above that we will be dealing with an administration whose foreign policy “will be based on ... principles and pragmatism, not rigid ideology, on facts and evidence, not emotion or prejudice.”

That does not mean that an inherently protectionist Congress can be expected to see the light on softwood lumber or border security or the auto industry or much else.

And some elements of the US psyche will still be prominent—notably the profound belief on both sides of the political isle in US exceptionalism.

In fact, that sentiment is likely to be stronger with the accession of an African-American to the leadership of the world.

“Only in America could this story happen”, etc.

But the religiosity of US foreign policy seems likely to diminish, as does its militaristic quotient.

Further, the US is going to be seen as “cool” again, an antidote to the rampant anti-Americanism and anti-Bush’ism of recent years.

As the comedian Bill Maher has observed, “the rest of the world can go back to being completely jealous of America. Yes...our majority white country just freely elected a black president; something no other democracy has ever done. Take that, Canada!”

In fact that accomplishment could have particular salience in Canada.

Those few of us old enough to remember, do remember the significance of Kennedy and Camelot to Trudeuamania.

Canadian politics turned to the next generation for leadership.

At the same time for all of Barack Obama’s worldliness, it is not apparent that Canada is one of the countries he knows well.

In fact, we are dealing with an Administration that does not know us well, Susan Rice possibly accepted.

It is a relationship that will require a major effort in building relationships and communications, not widely regarded as the strong points of the current Canadian government.

President Obama's upcoming visit presents an opportunity to start building that relationship, and should not be seen as an occasion for discussing a laundry list of bilateral irritants.

Rather, the visit will permit the PM to discuss with the President the significance to both countries of our integrated economy, our common interests on energy security, climate change and the Arctic, and the capacity of Canada to do some of the lifting abroad, notably on multilateral governance issues and arms control and disarmament.

The visit will, also, require us to take ourselves seriously again.

For Canadians, probably more so than for most others, there is a temptation to occupy ourselves exclusively with our heretofore, at least, relatively untroubled and commercially profitable bilateral relationship with Washington, whatever else is happening in the world and whatever US foreign policy might be.

Get our bilateral trade policy right, the thinking goes, and everything else will take care of itself.

Besides, Canada is little; what else can Canada do besides throw in its lot with whoever is in office in Washington?

In fact, we are not so little and we can do a lot in the world if we want to.

And the more we do in the world and the more effective we are in doing it, the more respect we get in Washington.

And the more respect we get in Washington, the more we can do abroad and the more effective we can be, both abroad and in Washington.

Moreover, this is one of those times when Canadians need to be primordially concerned with the wider world and how it is to be governed.

The last multi-power world finished badly, with two world wars and 60 million dead.

All nations have an enormous stake in effective global governance, in inculcating respect for law rather than recourse to power, the US and Canada not least among them.

The world, including Canada, needs the kind of astute, far-sighted, principled leadership the US provided in the inter-war years and the Cold War years.

Under Bush, the US has become Paragon lost.

Under Obama, the Paragon can be restored.

The world needs an America it can believe in again.

That is Obama's main strength.

It is, also, his greatest challenge.

It is in Canada's interest to help him meet it.

Thank You