

CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

EDITORIAL

Mr. O goes to Washington: The bigger-than-big agenda

MODERNITY'S FIRST WEB 2.0 PRESIDENT

Obama's political capital is at its zenith and eventually the tide will turn; but for now, Leader Obama is unlike any other contemporary political figure. What sets him apart is a combination of his youth, his forceful ideas, the jaw-numbing crisis he faces, and the innovative way he constantly networks with his base, integrating it into the policy process. All of this has pushed him and us, Canada and Mexico, into uncharted waters because he is committed to changing the way politics is done and how the economy operates.

BY DANIEL DRACHE AND
JOSÉ LUIS VALDÉS-UGALDE

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In office a month over 100 days, and Obama's action agenda to rescue the American economy seems hesitant and in danger of being derailed. His message is that Americans both need and expect action: "Millions of jobs that Americans relied on just a year ago are gone; millions more of the nest eggs families

worked so hard to build have vanished. People everywhere are worried about what tomorrow will bring. What Americans expect from Washington is action that matches the urgency they feel in their daily lives—action that's swift, bold and wise enough for us to climb out of this crisis" (*Washington Post*, February 5, 2009).

The push back from the Republicans and neo-conservative movement is a major obstacle to a really strong stimulus package. At present, Obama's bipartisan approach is not working. Skeptics don't believe he will succeed, and pragmatists

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SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION POST-BUSH

The quest for the perfectly secure border

THE THREAT OF POROUS BORDERS

Andrew Speaker had at least this in common with a terrorist: he was determined not to be caught. Speaker, a US citizen, had been warned by American health authorities in May 2007 to stay at home in Atlanta after he contracted a highly infectious, drug-resistant strain of tuberculosis. But he had plans to be married in Europe, so he ignored the warning and flew to Paris. Two weeks later, after US officials had tracked him down in Rome, he promised to get treatment there and refrain from travelling. Yet the

BY EDWARD ALDEN

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next day he broke his word and boarded a flight from Prague to Montreal, where he rented a car and drove across the US border at Champlain, New York. When the news broke, it became Exhibit A for those who think that porous borders remain the biggest threat to US security. Congress immediately convened hear-

ings to vent its outrage at the Department of Homeland Security. If a known TB carrier could be waved into the country across the northern border, they argued, how much harder could it be for one of bin Laden's operatives?

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are uncertain of its benefits. The bipartisan strategy on Obama's stimulus bill failed to win over a single Republican.

A PARADIGM SHIFT: EYES WIDE OPEN PLEASE

Fundamental reforms can be thought of as what experts call a "paradigm shift" or, in simpler language, a fundamental reordering of the function and structures of the institutions of the global economy. The collapse of greed-ridden Wall Street as the financial epicentre of the global economy has produced seismic shock waves throughout the rest of the world. The US economy is contracting at a rate of 6 percent, the once muscular German economy at 7 percent, the troubled Japanese economy at 12 percent, and the formerly dynamic Korean economy at 22 percent over the fourth quarter of 2008. These numbers present a chilling reality for the new US president. He is most preoccupied with the hundreds of thousands of Americans losing their employment as layoffs soar each month.

Obama's stimulus package has to restart American factories and find ways to reduce a mountain of trade deficits. It is likely there will be new rules for multinational US enterprises to keep more value-added production at home. The salaries of bank presidents whose institutions have received billions of taxpayers' dollars in bailouts need to be capped, the sooner the better. On the trade front, serious initiatives will be made to resuscitate the collapsed WTO trade round to help get the world over the worst of the crisis. However, it is the magnitude of the rise of mass unemployment that is most dangerous to the future political life of any politician whether in the United States or any other country that has been brought to its knees by the impact of the current crisis. The United States is losing 500,000 jobs per month, Brazil lost 650,000 jobs in December, and Beijing, the one-time dynamo of the global economy, reports that an astonishing 20 million Chinese workers have seen their

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jobs disappear since the financial crunch began. The world economy now depends increasingly on the life support measures of the Obama administration to counter the worst effects of the global slowdown. It is not clear whether the United States can do this alone without a coordinated strategy between banks and governments across the world or even whether this Mount Everest-sized collapse of financial markets has reached bottom yet.

A PUBLIC POLICY IN NEED OF LEGS

By any standard, Obama's agenda for action is unimaginably complex. Millions of Americans are demanding swift and effective new policies. Under President Bush, the number one strategic priority was homeland security—overriding all public policy goals and framing every decision large or small. The mantra of the Obama administration is America first, and he has much to fix because so much is broken. A great deal of the current debate focuses on these pressing questions: is the stimulus on offer big enough and does it direct funding to the right places?

Experts, divided on these questions, are looking to the past for answers. In the 1930s, the United States faced a day of reckoning from debt disintegration

and mass unemployment. As with the earlier collapse of financial markets, the extreme monetary policy of the last two decades has produced a cascade of debacles that has precipitated mass corporate default and ruined millions of consumers whose life savings have disappeared down a sinkhole of corporate mismanagement and financial greed. Few experts doubt that Obama will have to find his own way out of the crisis.

The challenge for Obama is to impose regulatory discipline on markets while at the same time keeping the system going by absorbing a mountain of debt. Everything hinges on the outcome of deleveraging, an economist's term for finding a safe harbour for \$3 trillion in toxic assets! The key issue is whether Obama will in the end nationalize the banks, as George Soros and Joseph Stiglitz are predicting, and finance a takeover of the system or whether he will choose to pour money into resuscitating failed institutions. It is not inconceivable in the present climate that like many governments, Obama's will have to own some of the largest banks in order to save the American banking system.

NAFTA, THE TIE THAT DIVIDES AND UNITES US

Canadians and Mexicans were glued to their television sets on November 4, 2008 to watch Obama become the 44th president-elect. They also cheered the end of the degraded Bush-Cheney presidency along with millions of Americans. According to the latest public opinion polls, Obama is twice as popular as Stephen Harper in Canada, and the numbers are no less extraordinary for Felipe Calderon in Mexico. The widely held perception is that the Canadian and Mexican governments are out of sync with the momentous changes coming from the White House. It was said of Lincoln, in a biography by Doris Kearns Goodwin, that his eloquence "was of a higher type which produced conviction

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in others because of the conviction of the speaker himself.” By contrast, Mexicans and Canadians do not have leaders that raise the bar of public life or inspire the “hearer” toward a new kind of politics.

For North Americans, the strategic reality that defines their relationship to the United States is NAFTA. Mexico and Canada have invested everything in this difficult and often disappointing economic-legal agreement with its exemptions and circumventions. There is no commonly agreed to definition of a subsidy, no restriction on the deployment of US trade law, and no guaranteed opt-out from many state and federal laws.

The contributors to this special issue of *Canada Watch* offer conflicting views about NAFTA’s significance for the future and other topics that have become essential to the ongoing integration process itself. Some of our contributors urge a full throttle acceptance of a NAFTA-plus, and certainly there is plenty of room for cooperation to build infrastructure to move people cheaply and easily all over the continent particularly from north to south. Others argue that the Obama administration will move swiftly and with determination to create jobs for out-of-work Americans. In the election campaign, Obama promised to revisit NAFTA, an exercise many Mexicans and Canadians also believe is long overdue. He argued that the United States needs to look at what is broken and what is working. North America’s future will be dysfunctional without its reform, and the need to revisit this landmark agreement is essential.

MEXICO AND CANADA: DIVERGENT NEEDS

Our contributors point to a more fundamental problem between Obama and his NAFTA partners. Canada and Mexico have neither voice nor representation in the forging of the new consensus. Canadians and Mexicans are anxious about the future of their auto, steel, and manu-

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facturing industries. The multi-billion-dollar “Buy American” stimulus package and the new law giving the United States the exclusive right to supply iron and steel as well as other manufactured goods are spitefully protectionist and set a dangerous precedent if the language is not moderated and the bills withdrawn.

The Harper government is furiously lobbying the US Congress for an opt-out provision from US law, but it has no legal ground to stand on and even less political clout with a Congress focused on America’s domestic crisis. “Buy American” laws are excluded from NAFTA’s legal regime according to trade experts. Obama said that his administration would “massage” the language in these bills but he was defeated in the Senate. Canadians can’t expect Obama to rescue the Canadian economy, but it is still unclear whether the Harper government has any strategic plan to protect Canadian jobs and businesses. It is operating on the old reflex that access to the US market is the priority and that building policy space through smart government intervention is a second-order goal.

The Mexican administration is, on the other hand, deeply troubled by the urgency of the crisis, which attacks Mexican stability on several crucial fronts. Apart from being anxious about the future of some strategic industries,

the government is simultaneously confronting the most asymmetrical and dangerous war of all—the war against unmanageable organized crime and a corrupted political class, if not a corrupt institutional political establishment—which has provided reason to speculate on whether or not Mexico is a failed state. Mexico has failed to deliver a death blow to narco-terrorism not only because of the increasing incompetence of the whole Mexican political system but also because of US culpability in the escalation of violence in terms of drug demand. In the United States, there are 35 million consumers of illegal substances and an abundant supply of black market weapons, which end up in the hands of the cartels.

The meeting between Obama and Calderon in the days leading up to the inauguration was both a tremendous diplomatic achievement and an example of the leverage that Mexico, embracing fully its role as partner, can have in the US security agenda. And yet, although Obama may be a one-of-a-kind leader, he is not the North American Moses, let alone the Mexican salvation. Still, a cooperative and multilateral presidency in the United States may be understood as a window of opportunity for Mexico to boost, at last, a comprehensive agenda for the bilateral relationship in both traditional and alternative areas such as energy, environmental issues, and cooperation education, among others. Only this broader approach can redefine and relaunch the next positive chapter in North American relations within an atmosphere of cooperative and respectful behaviour from both governments.

THE END OF THE NAFTA CONSENSUS

North America will look radically different in a year’s time as huge shifts in production and employment will make this vast market economy more difficult to manage. The once easy consensus over NAFTA and its benefits has disappeared


into the pages of history. The current fiscal collapse looks particularly frightening because all three North American economies are moving into recession or are already there. The near collapse of the banking sector and the imminent bankruptcy of GM, Chrysler, and possibly Ford signal that the worst is far from over. In fairness to Obama, it needs to be said that he has not yet given a lot of thought to the architecture of deep integration post-Bush.

It is unlikely that he will use his Washington office to discredit the policies of his predecessor; but it would be better to use his power to frighten bankers, business people, and investors into

accepting that financial stability is needed to calm the markets and to return to a sense of proportion so as to avoid any further catastrophic losses in the financial markets. Narco-terrorism in Mexico and a massive illegal trafficking of handguns in both Canada and the United States have begun to broaden the debate over security. The situation on both counts is likely to get worse before it gets better.

It has been observed that when countries abandon old, orthodox assumptions about public policy, innovative diplomacy is possible because it is in everyone's self-interest. This insight applies particularly to the future of North

America. NAFTA illustrates the clash between liberal elements mixed with *dirigiste*, power-based rules that have left Canada and Mexico permanently off balance. The collapse of the US housing market, its troubled financial institutions, and the sea of job loss have made huge holes in the idea of North America as an integrated set of markets.

What we don't know is this: Will Obama be solely responsible for setting a coherent North American agenda? What will be the role and responsibility of Mexico and Canada? Will they be able to renegotiate a comprehensive and inclusive social agenda? We are all waiting to exhale. 

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The reaction to Speaker's sojourn was a warning about what is still to come as the mentality of "homeland security" becomes ever more firmly entrenched in Washington, despite the years that have passed since the 9/11 attacks. The administration of Barack Obama may change the nuances and nudge the priorities, but it is a world view that is shared by Democrats and Republicans alike. And it will make life still more complicated and difficult for America's neighbours on its northern and southern borders.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Since its establishment in 2003 at the urging of congressional Democrats, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has conceived its mission as one of plugging vulnerabilities. For the United States, this was a radically new concept. In its modern history, America had always defended itself far from its borders, either fighting wars abroad or deterring the handful of adversaries capable of striking US territory by threatening massive retaliation. Although 9/11 did not abolish that paradigm, it certainly altered it. Because suicide terrorists could not be deterred, the reasoning went, they must be kept outside the United States.

That launched the quest for the perfectly secure border, and it has brought a gradually escalating effort to deploy people, technologies, and old-fashioned barriers to keep the "bad guys" out of the United States.

That launched the quest for the perfectly secure border, and it has brought a gradually escalating effort to deploy people, technologies, and old-fashioned barriers to keep the "bad guys" out of the United States. It began with the most obvious threats revealed by the 9/11 attacks, but has since fanned out to ever more ambitious efforts to protect against ever smaller threats—not just terrorism but drug runners, illegal migrants, and careless travellers with communicable diseases. It is an approach that has its own expansive logic: once you plug one gap in the border defences, the next one on the list looms that much larger.

The US list began, quite reasonably, with the hijackers themselves. All 19 had come from Middle Eastern countries on validly issued visas, so the first step was to tighten visa procedures, especially from countries known to have an al-Qaeda presence. All had flown to the

United States, so Washington forced airlines to turn over their passenger lists for all future incoming flights. At least two of the hijackers, and possibly more, should have been on US terrorist watch lists, so Washington broke down internal barriers to information sharing and added hundreds of thousands of names.

Those measures—more careful visa scrutiny, advanced information on incoming passengers, and a robust, if not terribly discriminating, terrorist watch list—probably went 90 percent of the way to keeping out al-Qaeda operatives. But that's where it started to get complicated. As terrorism experts point out, al-Qaeda is an adaptable adversary, so once the obvious routes to the United States were blocked, they could be expected to look for others.

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The biggest concern was Europe. Most Europeans can travel to the United States without first getting a visa. As the London and Madrid train bombings showed, Europe has a handful of radicalized Muslims prepared to attack civilians. So as the price for maintaining the visa waiver program, the United States forced European nations into a series of concessions. The Europeans agreed to hand over detailed advanced information on all passengers flying into the United States despite the problems this caused under Europe's more stringent privacy rules; they would alert Washington when any blank passports were stolen, which had been an endemic problem in countries like Belgium; and they would share information on their own lists of terrorist suspects.

US-VISIT

Then in early 2004, the United States launched the fingerprinting scheme, or the United States Visitor and Immigration Status Indicator Technology program known as US-Visit. It was originally conceived in the 1990s as a way to stop visa overstayers, who are thought to make up as much as 40 percent of illegal immigrants living in America. But after 9/11 it was repackaged and sold on terrorism grounds. For most travellers to the United States, that now means getting fingerprinted twice—once when you get the visa, and again when you arrive in the United States. For most Europeans, Japanese, and citizens of other visa waiver countries, it just happens once.

Washington announced recently that the scheme would be expanded to include permanent residents or green card holders living in the country. Not surprisingly given its origins, the program has done nothing to identify terrorists, but the DHS points out that more than 4,000 criminals and immigration violators have been stopped. Not a threat on par with terrorism, to be sure, but who could object to keeping criminals and unauthorized migrants out of the country?

[I]f the legal ports of entry can be secured, the long undefended borders will then become the biggest threat.

As each of these vulnerabilities was checked off the US to-do list after 9/11, the next item rose in priority. That has brought us to where we are today, with much of the focus on the northern and southern land borders. Due to the sheer volume of crossings, the land borders pose special, and possibly insurmountable, problems for an approach to homeland security premised on plugging vulnerabilities. Mexicans are already facing stricter identification requirements at the southern border, which has produced further delays in the already gridlocked ports of entry. Canadians, and Americans crossing the northern border, are set to face the same requirements as of June 2009 unless Congress pushes the deadline back again, which is unlikely.

Mexicans and Canadians, in most cases, are not routinely fingerprinted when they come to the United States. Yet under laws already passed by Congress, they are supposed to be, and the DHS is experimenting with ways to make that happen without stalling cross-border traffic entirely. And the entry fingerprint is only step one. Congress has also mandated that every visitor should “check out” of the country as well. For stopping terrorists, this has almost no value, but it would be helpful for immigration control. The DHS has recently proposed that airlines collect the fingerprints from departing airport passengers, which has the airline industry up in arms. No one has any good ideas about how to do this at the land borders, but it is inching up on the to-do list of vulnerabilities.

FORTIFYING THE BORDERS

Finally, if the legal ports of entry can be secured, the long undefended borders will then become the biggest threat. Ever more of the US–Mexican border has been fortified in the name of keeping out drugs and illegal migrants. About 500 miles of steel fence are already in place. President Obama's new homeland security secretary Janet Napolitano—who knows that border well as a former Arizona governor—is a critic of the fence, but has been enthusiastic about a “virtual fence” composed of surveillance cameras, unmanned aerial drones, and heat-sensing technologies. So far the pilot projects have failed dismally, but once the kinks are worked out, the same schemes are likely to be rolled out along the US–Canadian border.

The question arises: could any of this have kept Typhoid Andy from returning home to Atlanta? Possibly, but not necessarily. US border inspectors had been warned to watch for him, but the inspector at Champlain ignored the warning and let him in anyway. And it turns out he wasn't all that contagious after all, and does not appear to have infected anyone.

The problem with the perfect border is that we live in an imperfect world—a world of ill-defined threats and fallible people trying to respond to them. The United States needs some way to distinguish urgent and serious threats from minor ones, and to calculate the costs—to the economy, to relations with neighbours and allies, and to its tarnished image as an open and welcoming society—of trying to counter those threats. In other words, the United States needs a strategy, not just a series of reactions. That is the real border challenge for the Obama administration, but not one, sadly, that it is likely to embrace. 🍁

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The dirty war on the immigrant: History's lessons, past and present

SIMPLE ENEMIES

Simple minds need simple enemies. This is particularly so in times when complex structural changes that are not fully understood threaten traditional and cherished ways of life. Around 1900, “the Jew”—male, crooked nose, fat, glib, dirty, cheating—was the enemy. Around 2000, “the immigrant”—male, brown-yellow-black, emaciated, sly, cheating border guards—was made the enemy. Whereas anti-Semitism led to the Holocaust, today anti-immigrantism had led to the deaths of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of men and women annually in the Sonoran-Arizonan desert, the waters of the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic Ocean.

For centuries, Jews were discriminated against, their options for economic activities severely constrained, and their places of residence relegated to certain underserved quarters of cities or whole states. Having been made different, they were different. Immigrants have been discriminated against for a century and a half, ever since the concept of the “nation” was introduced and the requirement made that the population of a state consist of cultural clones with a single national identity, one mother tongue, and a readiness to die for the fatherland. Just as “the Jew” had been constructed as a different race, though he was merely of different religion, the immigrant, too, was germ-ridden, needing to be cleansed upon entering society. They were unnatural and needed to be naturalized to become citizens, though this option was open only to a few and certainly not for those genetically “deficient” or “of other races.”

FLASHBACK ONE

Spanish warrior-settlers arrive in what today is called New Mexico, fur traders and later armed men (soldiers) and a few settlers arrive in the St. Lawrence Valley, while religious fundamentalists

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[T]he present war on immigrants requires a brainwashing of entire societies, which must be made to forget their own past.

calling themselves Puritans land along the coast of what would become New England. Although they were immigrants to regions already settled by other peoples, the Puritans, in New England, and the Britons, in Canada, would come to dominate the knowledge-producing sector of their respective societies by the 19th century, styling themselves first-comers, and appropriating to themselves institutional hegemony and power-wielding dominance.

Immigrants can be dangerous to settled societies as First Peoples across the Americas can attest. At the turn of the 20th century in North America, one of these immigrant societies, the United States, identifies immigrants as fiendish races to be deported. In Canada, the legal framework may be far more open, but immigration programs such as those concerning refugees or seasonal workers leave much to be desired. In Mexico, the descendants of the native inhabitants are still discriminated against—few exploitable immigrants arrive because the “Indios” can be exploited.

FLASHBACK TWO

In Europe, where the concept of the nation as settled from time immemorial was invented only about 150 years ago, the elites who dominate knowledge production eradicated from memory multiple intra-European migrations. The aristocracy migrated for purposes of marriage and power constituting a trans-European rather than national elite. The middle classes moved between cities to seek economic opportunities, establishing trade networks as well as regimes of exploitation of colonized peoples across the globe. The labouring classes migrated to find jobs, and peasant families moved to tillable lands where they could eke out a living and seize better opportunities. Europe's allegedly non-immigrant nation-states are in reality founded on mobile people and a multitude of migrations, and cultural interaction. The same holds true for Chinese society, Indian society—all parts of the world, in fact.

REWRITING HISTORY

The lesson of this source-based rather than ideology-based historiography is: “Immigrants are us.” Thus, the present war on immigrants requires a brainwashing of entire societies, which must be made to forget their own past. If, in the present, “we” (people descended from immigrants) want to prevent “them” (today's immigrants) from coming, deport those already arrived, or eradicate people labelled “illegal” or “asylum cheaters,” then the officials of society's historical memory rituals have to delete all the files containing information on the migration aspect of “our” shared past. Fascists and fascist-minded gatekeepers in the 1930s refused entry to Jews (in the words of one administrator, “none is too many”), wanted to deport Jews to Madagascar (as a highly placed magazine publisher suggested), or

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advocated sending them to concentration camps.

If critical minds reinsert the memory stick labelled “migration,” then the whole history of the North Atlantic world and of the world in general appears fuller, livelier, and more innovative. The migration-included narrative more closely reflects the data retrieved from those societies. Migrant men and women arrive with minds and bodies, and with ideas and initiative. They want to improve their lives or, if they arrive as refugees, rebuild interrupted life-courses. Many depart from circumstances similar to those of Jewish migrants in the past: Their economic activities have been limited in a global apartheid in which the richer (mainly white-skinned) segments of the global economy exploit the poorer (mainly non-white and non-Christian) peoples of the world. Institutions like international or world banks and monetary funds as well as globally active corporations profit from this system. The label “free trade” has become Orwellian Newspeak for the protective walls that prevent an equalization of life chances and the achievement of human rights across the world. The often touted concept of “sustainable ecologies” for living and future generations needs to be expanded to emphasize “sustainable lives” in all regions of the world and free movement between such regions.

The dehumanizing of immigrants, as practised by many politicians, mass media writers and spokespersons, and right-wing voters, prevents actual and potential migrant men and women from feeding themselves and their children, and from selecting the options guaranteed to the living by the concept of human rights since the Atlantic world’s “Age of Revolution.” Finally, it denies them the recognition of the US Declaration of Independence that all men, women, and children are created equal. It also deprives the societies that migrants want to reach, whether in the European Union, Canada, or the United States, the skills and cultural input of potential new-


History may not repeat itself, but like anti-Semitism, anti-immigrantism dehumanizes its very proponents.

comers. Walls, whether the Chinese, the Berlin, or the one on the southern border of the United States, have never been able to stop those who are to be kept out from craving survival and better chances. Potential and actual migrants, to use current Western terminology, are entrepreneurs in their own lives. They are ready to take risks, invest in their own skills, and provide a safe future for their children.

THE FUTURE

At one time in history, Iberian monarchs expelled Jews and Muslims, depriving the peninsula’s many societies of their capabilities and connectivity to other societies. At another time, a society labelling itself superior and Aryan

expelled and exterminated Jews, Roma, and Sinti as allegedly inferior East and Southeast Europeans, and thrust the globe into destructive and self-destructive warfare. Do our governments today want to continue with this type of history or do they want to embrace the human rights concepts of the Enlightenment and the succeeding revolutions? Are US, Canadian, or European citizens superior to people of other places of birth and other colours of skin—as some politicians and commentators seem to argue? Charters of rights need to apply to all humanity and not exclude people who want to change their abode and leave a “home” that is unsafe and unsustainable with the purpose of building a new inhabitable structure for their lives and their progeny.

History provides negative as well as positive options. History may not repeat itself, but like anti-Semitism, anti-immigrantism dehumanizes its very proponents. Barbed wire is not a policy. If, in 2009, many US citizens and much of the world look to President Obama to effect changes, this is insufficient. Each and every one of us needs to act to fight walled-in minds, and to provide chances to all men and women, whether migrant or resident. 

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The Latino strategic vote in the Obama era: Tough choices ahead

THE LATINO VOTE

Observers believe that the Latino vote is becoming increasingly central in American democracy. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, Latinos, who account for 15 percent of the total population in the United States, make up 9 percent of the electorate. Furthermore, Latinos are becoming a key factor in the electoral success of Democrats. In the past presidential election, 67 percent of them voted Democrat according to exit polls carried out by the same organization, in contrast to 31 percent who voted Republican. This figure represents a preference of more than two-to-one in favour of Barack Obama. The number increases for the youth vote (76 percent) and for females (68 percent). These figures represent a clear expression of the political force of Latinos, which will continue to increase given that they account for 50.5 percent of overall population growth in the country.

Given this demographic and political trend, it is clear that Obama must deal with the Latino social and cultural agenda in the near future. At some point in his first term in office, the president will have to address the main issues on the Latino agenda—migration and citizenship. Latino immigrants, many of them undocumented Mexicans, do not envisage improvements to their living standards without simpler access to some form of citizenship that offers them a set of basic human rights.

A Pew Hispanic Center study shows that, because of the economic crisis being experienced in the United States and throughout the world, immigrants not enjoying citizenship witnessed a significant decline in their income between 2006 and 2007. In this period, the income of immigrants without citizenship fell by 7.3 percent, in contrast to the national income average, which rose by 1.3 percent. Non-citizen households account for 7 percent of all American

BY ARIADNA ESTÉVEZ

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Latino support for President Obama, together with the community's ever-increasing political power, should be reason enough for the new administration to address the community's vulnerable economic and social situation, offering policy alternatives such as easier access to citizenship.

homes and 52 percent of all immigrant residences. Over half of the non-resident community are Latinos (56 percent) and 45 percent of them are headed by an undocumented immigrant. The disadvantageous situation of Latinos is related to the economic and social vulnerability of recently arrived immigrants, most of whom have only a high school education at best and are employed in blue-collar production and construction occupations or unskilled jobs in the service sector.

NON-RESIDENT VULNERABILITY

This vulnerability of non-resident, mostly undocumented, migrants is at the root of Latino disapproval of immigration policy trends during the Bush administration. A Pew Hispanic Center survey based on a sample of 2,015 Latino adults showed that 63 percent of Latinos interviewed perceived their situation as deteriorating while considerable numbers have experienced discrimination, such as being stopped by the police and questioned about their migration status (8 percent citizens and 10 percent immigrants). At the same time, 15 percent have found it hard to find or keep a job because of their ethnicity, and 10 percent have found it difficult to find homes or keep them for the reasons mentioned above.

As a consequence, according to the 2008 National Survey of Latinos by the Pew Hispanic Center, "More than four-in-five Hispanics (81 percent) say that immigration enforcement should be left mainly to the federal authorities rather than the local police; 76 percent disapprove of workplace raids; 73 percent disapprove of the criminal prosecution of undocumented immigrants who are working without authorization; and 70 percent disapprove of the criminal prosecution of employers who hire undocumented immigrants. A narrow majority (53 percent) disapproves of a requirement that employers check a federal database to verify the legal immigration status of all prospective hires."

Latino support for President Obama, together with the community's ever-increasing political power, should be reason enough for the new administration to address the community's vulnerable economic and social situation, offering policy alternatives such as easier access to citizenship. Generally speaking, through becoming citizens, immigrants are able to vote and to hold public

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office, as well as gain access to social benefits and full labour rights. In addition, they can extend citizenship to their children and apply for family reunification. All of these factors could help to reduce social, economic, and cultural vulnerability. However, access to citizenship is difficult for Latino immigrants because naturalization requires applicants to lawfully enter the country and gain legal permanent resident status. In addition, the law obliges immigrants applying for naturalization to understand, speak, read, and write some English, which is not the case for most undocumented Latino immigrants.

NEW FORMS OF CITIZENSHIP

However, it is also fair to say that President Obama cannot offer easy access to American citizenship for all immigrants, documented or otherwise. Realist American politics would not allow for a “migration without borders” approach. Nevertheless, Obama could consider, in response to Latino support and the community’s increasing political power, new forms of citizenship that are both parallel to national citizenship and narrower in scope. Some of these possibilities are normative, and have already been put into practice, while other models remain theoretical but politically feasible:

Denizenship. In *Democracy and the Nation State: Aliens, Denizens, and Citizens in a World of International Migration* (Avebury, 1990), Tomas Hammar has conceptualized *denizens* as documented immigrants living in some European countries who hold a job, pay taxes, and have access to social services, but are unable to vote or hold office.


Civic citizenship. This is the policy proposal of the Migration Policy Group to the European Union. It would guarantee a number of core rights to third-country, long-term residents in the EU so that they hold similar rights to those held by European citizens, such as the right to move within countries for work pur-

Realist American politics would not allow for a “migration without borders” approach.

poses. By holding civic citizenship, documented immigrants are treated in a comparable way to nationals of the host state. Civic citizenship includes the rights to: non-discrimination; residence; protection against expulsion; access to employment and self-employment; access to family reunification; access to education, vocational training, and recognition of qualifications; access to social security and social assistance; association and membership including membership in trade unions; participation in political life at the local level; vote in European parliamentary elections; and movement for work and study purposes to any state in the EU.

Universal citizenship. This is the academic policy proposal of CISAN. It is similar to denizenship and civic citizenship insofar as it extends some of the rights enjoyed by national citizens to immigrants (protection against discrimination, union rights, local electoral rights, and basic social rights to health, education, and housing). However, at the core of universal citizenship are the human rights to mobility (migrate/emi-

grate), children’s rights to family and to be free from violence, to justice and judicial security, and to personal security and freedom; therefore, universal citizenship is also extended to undocumented migrants. This extension relies on the moral obligations of well-off nations toward the worse-off, until such time as better global political economy relations allow for real social and economic development for poor countries. Universal citizenship is based on the de facto exercising of the right to work and provides four types of rights: rights to mobility, basic rights for a decent life, rights for the enjoyment of identity and difference, and political rights. See the CISAN publication *Migración, Globalización y Derechos Humanos: Construyendo la Ciudadanía Universal* (Estévez, 2009).

President Obama therefore has policy options to help the Latino community to improve their opportunities through access to citizenship without compromising American citizenship and realist political commitments to sovereignty. 

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Split decisions: Harper's failed bid for a majority government in the 2008 election

VOTER FRUSTRATION AND APATHY

Parents and teachers of a certain vintage tell young people: it's a privilege to vote. To have the franchise and not exercise it is to thumb your nose at one of the greatest pieces of good fortune human beings can enjoy: life in a society where choices about collective life are made with pens and persuasion, not bombs and guns. What does it mean, then, that even Canadians who make this speech—never mind its intended audience of supposedly disengaged young people—have grown weary of the ballot over the past five years?

In the elections of the 1980s, voter turnout hovered around 75 percent. A moderate decline occurred during the 1990s. But in 2004, just 61 percent of Canadians turned out for the half-hearted re-election of the Liberals under Paul Martin. That year, voters were ticked off at the Liberals but afraid of the Conservatives. In 2006, Canadians got over their cold feet and 65 percent of us turned up to shoo the scandal-plagued Liberals out of government and cautiously hand Stephen Harper's Conservatives the keys to the executive suite. By late 2008, voters were sick of the whole narrative. Stephen Harper and company were returned to government with another minority—but this time only 59 percent of registered voters bothered to cast a ballot, the lowest proportion in Canadian history. Should yet another election be called in 2009, it might be only the candidates' families and a few political science majors who bother to shuffle over to the local elementary school to have their say.

Although many factors contribute to declining voter turnout over time, we must surely attribute at least some of the diminished electoral enthusiasm to a

BY MICHAEL ADAMS

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Canadians want a strong leader, but they want this strong leader to articulate values and ideals that do not go hand in hand with strongman politics.

sense of frustration and deadlock in federal politics. What do Canadians want, and why are they having such a hard time getting it?

WHAT DO CANADIANS WANT?

Given that votes in this country are carved up among five major political parties, there is no doubt that Canadians want different things. But the rise (and (as of this writing, ongoing) fall of the famous Liberal-NDP coalition did serve to clarify at least one area of broad agreement that cut across party lines: Canadians want adult supervision in Ottawa and they feel it is in short supply.

When word of the coalition first began to circulate, many pundits opined that Stephen Harper had overreached with the government's economic update. Having won just 38 percent of the popular vote (which yielded 46 percent of the seats in the House), he was too vulnerable to be making bold gambits like cut-

ting off opposing parties' government funding. Canadians, their dissent made manifest in the form of a Liberal-led coalition, would not stand for it.

Then the polls came. It turned out most Canadians thought the problem was not a predatory prime minister, but opposition parties prizing power over stability in the middle of an economic crisis. On the evening news, they saw Stéphane Dion (the most unpopular Liberal leader since Edward Blake), the all too effervescent Jack Layton, and the Cheshire-grinned separatist/sovereignist Gilles Duceppe. The unlikely leading the unacceptable. Six in ten Canadians said the coalition should take a hike. Had an election been held amid the December fiasco, the Conservatives, according to the polls, would have won 45 percent of the popular vote and a huge majority in the House. This was so, not necessarily because Canadians' love of the party or its leader had increased seven points since the October election, but because Canadians had taken it into their heads that it might be a good idea to have a stable federal government as the world plunges into economic chaos. They cast their disbelieving gaze on their fractious Parliament, wondering whether there was anyone in that august assembly who might agree with them.

The pundits' prediction of the success of the coalition was not the first time they had diverged from—or misapprehended—public opinion on the issue of strong leadership. In the period between the 2006 and 2008 elections, many columnists and radio and television panels meditated on the salubrious possibilities of minority government in a parliamentary system. Minority government could inspire restraint, compromise, and dialogue. It might be just the thing for a

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middle-of-the-road, risk-averse society such as ours—especially since the prospect of a Conservative majority under a Big Boss like Stephen Harper was so frightening.

But when Environics polled Canadians on these very issues in advance of the 2008 election, their conclusions were altogether different from the pundits'. Environics asked the public whether they would prefer that the October vote yield a minority or a majority government. Just 28 percent favoured another minority government, while a strong plurality of 46 percent thought a majority would be preferable. And these results were by no means contingent on an ABC (Anything But Conservative) victory: the majority of Canadians (57 percent) said they doubted that a Conservative majority would govern much differently from the way the Conservative minority had since 2006. Just 37 percent of the population thought that a Conservative majority government would mean major changes for the country (and some of that 37 percent surely thought the changes would be positive—not terrifying).

What these numbers show is not that Canadians want a Conservative majority government (for which they could have voted if they had wanted to), but that despite their squishy liberal values, Canadians like the idea of a strong leader with a grip on enough power that he or she can get things done. In some ways, Canadians recognize Stephen Harper as precisely such a leader. He is nothing if not commanding, and of the characters on offer at the last election, he was seen as by far the most prime ministerial. An Environics poll conducted prior to the last election found four in ten Canadians (39 percent) believing that Stephen Harper would make the best prime minister, putting him miles ahead of the next most popular choice, Jack Layton (15 percent). And yet in a Decima poll conducted in spring 2008, 55 percent of Canadians agreed with the statement, "There is something about Stephen Harper I just don't like."

How strong will our future leaders need to be to compensate for the weakening ties that unite this country?

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Here we come to the paradox of political leadership in contemporary Canada: Canadians want a strong leader, but they want this strong leader to articulate values and ideals that do not go hand in hand with strongman politics. One reason why Canadians are so besotted with Barack Obama is that he makes idealism, compassion, and compromise look like marks of vision and strength—not of naiveté or indecision.


Canadians are not alone in wanting a strong leader; people everywhere want to feel they are represented by someone they respect—and someone who will command respect from other leaders. Indeed, we may have an even greater appetite than usual for strong political leadership at the centre because we are such a decentralized federation, and so many of the decisions about our economy are made elsewhere. The man who famously said he did not want Canada's prime minister to be merely the head waiter for the country's premiers and that he wanted Canada to be more than a confederation of shopping centres, Pierre Trudeau, remains not only the most admired politician in Canadian history but the most admired person living or dead according to the latest (fall 2008) Environics social values survey. No one ever accused Trudeau of being weak, especially when he was standing up for Canadian sovereignty and our growing small-l liberal social values, from divorce and reproductive rights to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The centripetal forces that define Canada, and our current fragmented Parliament, make Canadians willing to prefer a leader who is perceived as

strong and occasionally wrong to one who is perceived to be weak. Poor Stéphane Dion became the poster boy for well-intentioned but weak leadership. Some Canadians felt for him as the victim of a schoolyard bully, but they were not about to elect him president of the student council out of mere sympathy.

At the moment of this writing, the latest poll (May 2009, conducted by Nanos) finds the Ignatieff-led Liberals enjoying a small lead over the Harper Conservatives, plus a very favourable reaction to the new Liberal leader right across the country and especially in Quebec. Only time will tell whether Mr. Ignatieff will fulfill the Trudeau promise of strong liberal leadership—both small l and capital L—in Canada.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I offer two closing thoughts on the current political situation in Canada. First: too many of our political pundits are showing the small-l liberal, big city bias that is skewing their analysis and putting them out of step with average Canadians. Second, Quebec is in the process of separating from Canada, not with the bang of yet another referendum on sovereignty, but with the whimpers of successive elections in which fluctuating but never diminishing support for the Bloc Québécois yields successive unstable minority governments. How strong will our future leaders need to be to compensate for the weakening ties that unite this country? And if most Canadians are uneasy with the kind of strength Stephen Harper displays, what model of strength might cause us to approach the polls with optimism and conviction instead of holding our noses or staying home? 

When 200 million travellers find themselves beltless and shoeless: Thinking thick borders

NO MORE FLASH AND DASH

Beginning June 2009, every Canadian who enters the United States must have a passport or equivalent documentation. This regulation will transform the once permeable, undefended, and easily traversed border for day trips into a high-security crossing point. The advantage of a thin border is obvious; and while it does lower transaction costs, this comes at a high price. It increases pressure for policy harmonization. The opposite is true for a thick border, which is typically long on security but short on efficiency—increased transaction costs, longer wait times, more inspections, bottlenecks, etc.

A rough estimate of the price tag for Canada-US border transactions is in the vicinity of a 3 percent tax on Canadian business (on the southern border, the price tag is about 5 percent for Mexican producers). By international standards, these transaction costs are not high and are simply part of doing business. They are no different from customs fees or shipping charges. In fact, real transaction costs have plummeted in recent times due to the introduction of new information technologies that enable the more efficient processing of travellers and trucks. However, staffing cutbacks among US customs agents and other personnel have increased waiting times at many border crossing points, and in the name of national security regulations, US authorities are demanding more paperwork, not less, from anxious Canadian exporters.

BORDERS ARE ALWAYS A MIXTURE OF THICK AND THIN

Contrary to the popular perception of the “undefended, easily traversed border,” borders are always thick for security, food and health, and citizenship. Since 9/11, the elephant in the room has been the US Homeland Security doc-

BY DANIEL DRACHE

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Contrary to the popular perception of the “undefended, easily traversed border,” borders are always thick for security, food and health, and citizenship.

trine, which can be summed up in the innocuous-sounding phrase “security is first.” What this means is that US security goals and objectives are paramount and can override Canadian goals. This is not a mere academic squabble; it is fundamental and limits Canada-US cooperation as a practical matter and by necessity extends US control on Canada’s side of the once undefended border.

THE DOCTRINE OF MAXIMUM RISK AVOIDANCE

The Bush-Cheney presidency adopted an extreme version of the doctrine of maximum risk avoidance that says in effect the United States can go to any length or enact any regulation to protect its national security interests regardless of costs to its neighbours. The former vice-president Dick Cheney put it this

way in an interview: if there was a 1 percent risk, it had to be treated as a 100 percent threat. In this doctrine there is no established definition of “risk assessment” that is goal driven and meets the public policy criteria of reasonable risk. Instead we have the ludicrous spectacle of more than 200 million men and women every year removing their belts and shoes every time they take a flight, all justified in the name of total risk avoidance.

The doctrine of total risk avoidance has many consequences that violate Canadian sovereignty beyond belt loosening. Beginning in June 2009, all Canadian airlines will be required to submit passenger lists to American authorities for vetting. The new rules do not apply to passengers travelling to the United States but to those in planes that fly over US air space! So far the Harper government is missing in action in fighting this regulation.

Should US authorities, on the basis of the information furnished by your Canadian air carrier, determine that you are a “risk to US security,” you cannot get on the plane. This new regulation forbids a Canadian citizen from even boarding the plane, a clear violation of Canadian law. Further, once your name appears on a security list, whether by error or mix up, there is no easy way to remove it. Over 60,000 Americans were barred from flying last year. Canadian senator Colin Kenny, chair of the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence, has found himself caught in the web of US security bureaucracy. His son’s name is on the US watch list despite the prominence of his father in security circles.

Anyone with doubts that the closing of the border has become a continent-wide reality should consider the following fact: removals of migrants (mainly Mexican and Central American peasant farmers and day labourers) from the United

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States by customs officials have reached over one million persons annually. Those removed are fingerprinted by US border security guards and then transported back across the border. Despite these measures, US authorities estimate that tens of thousands return within a year or less by crossing the border clandestinely to look for work in a continuing cycle of arrest and expulsion.

THE CONTAGION OF GUNS AND DRUGS

The obvious question to ask is: are North Americans getting good value for the \$50 billion plus spent on securing the continent's borders?

Despite the thickening of the Canada-US border since 9/11, North America's cities are besieged by unparalleled threats from gun trafficking and drug smuggling. The paradox is that guns and drugs are pouring across the border in unprecedented amounts according to both American and Canadian law officials. Tens of thousands of handguns are smuggled into Canada's cities each year. Trafficking in narcotics has reached epidemic proportions despite the draconian measures of US Homeland Security to plug the border and make it 100 per cent safe and secure. By any standard, the US security doctrine is a failure for North American society: today there are more shootings, more narco-trafficking, and more contraband crossing North America's borders.

EYEBALLING CRIMINALS: A 21st-CENTURY MAGINOT LINE

Canadian and American experts need to do better than propose the band-aid solutions now on offer. The fact is that as long as security is "first" and the elimination of any and all risk is the goal, the Canada-US border in its day-to-day operations will increasingly resemble its southern counterpart, with long wait times, bureaucratic red tape, and expensive choke points. The great northern border will get higher, wider, and tighter

Despite the thickening of the Canada-US border since 9/11, North America's cities are besieged by unparalleled threats from gun trafficking and drug smuggling.


for people, goods, and services but not so it would appear for handguns, crack, and heroin. The Harper government is working on the impossible assumption that the border police can eyeball and identify, in the words of Senator Kenny's 2007 Senate Committee report, "people who cross borders to engage in criminal activity." In what century does the Standing Committee live to believe such nonsense?

So far, the attempt to dramatically reduce waiting times through the use of high-tech border technology has failed. There is little real time efficiency on the ground, and much more time is required to get these systems up and running. In his new book on the closing of the US border, Edward Alden delivers an eye-opening account that should serve as a

cautionary tale for those scholars who dream of a world in which sovereignty for the US Congress is a thing of the past and in which high-tech scanners will make the border disappear for millions of day visitors.

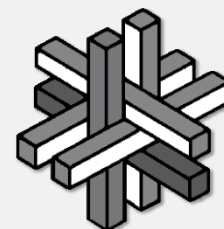
PROLOGUE TO THE FUTURE: WE ARE IN RECOIL MODE

For North American publics, the much talked about idea of deep integration as a security and economic priority has run into a solid wall of skepticism. The free trade model of prosperity and development has been overtaken by an unparalleled global financial crisis. As a result, no one should be surprised that North American governance is in recoil mode.

In 2001-2, the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade undertook an extensive cross-country consultation and came to the conclusion that "the project of North America, whatever it turns out to be, is yet to be defined—a conclusion that has not lost its relevance in the succeeding years. As the prospects for agenda setting on a North American community grow dimmer, the interest in it from private sector actors and corporate-sponsored think tanks has reached new heights of conjecture. The inverse ratio of expert speculation to reality should set alarm bells ringing. 

The Center for Research on North America at UNAM

The Center for Research on North America (CIS) originated in November 1988 as the University Research Program on the United States; three months later the University Council approved its transformation into the Center for Research on the United States (CISEUA). The National Autonomous University of Mexico thus made scientific research in this area a priority given the pre-eminence of the United States in the world and the importance of our geographical proximity to it.



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Budget ideas for a better Canada

THE BUDGET CONTEXT

In 2009, the US economy is facing its challenges with a new president. Hope is high. The major countries around the world (G20) have agreed to stimulate their economies by at least 2 percent of GDP. They have also indicated that protectionist policies will not be pursued at this time. This approach ensures that leakages from one member of the G20 to others will help all of the G20. It also means that there is every reason to not play protectionist games as stimulus is rolled out.

What did Canada do in its federal budget of January 27? It promised to deliver fiscal stimulus amounting to almost 2 percent in 2009 and somewhat less (1.4 percent) in 2010. This includes assumed provincial and municipal spending on infrastructure and additional spending by groups receiving focused lending (for example, the auto sector and some cities). If it emerges that not enough has been done, then the next budget or economic statement can add further stimulus. It will be important to watch the delivery to ensure that the actions are also completed.

There is general agreement that the United States went into recession in the latter part of 2007, Europe and Japan followed, and Asia has recently joined the recession fray. Canada entered the recession starting in the latter part of 2008. The lag in Canada should have provided the opportunity to rebuild the automatic stabilizers after tearing them down from the early 1990s on. We did not.

Provincial governments now face the full brunt of welfare load increases without federal participation. Increases on equalization have recently been limited. The temptation for the provinces will be to move toward restraint as the federal government stimulates, offsetting many of the positive impacts. This would be unfortunate, but not unexpected. The lack of trust between governments in Canada is leading to a dysfunctional system.

BY MIKE McCracken

Mike McCracken is the founder of Informetrica Limited.

Some tools can be easily reversed if conditions warrant, while others are likely to become permanent fixtures that will require new funding sources.

THE STARTING POINT

Starting in 2007, subprime mortgages became a problem for some financial institutions in the United States, with people walking away from their mortgages or banks foreclosing on mortgages for properties in arrears. After several years of a housing bubble, it burst with a sharp drop in new housing starts and growing concerns about the industry. It became apparent that many of these “toxic” mortgages were packaged and securitized around the world.

Subprime mortgages were not the only problem in the United States. Higher oil prices eroded consumer income as effectively as a major tax increase. The only difference was that the proceeds went mainly abroad—to OPEC, Mexico, and Canada. Other high commodity prices also hit consumers and some businesses, although others prospered. A depreciating US dollar increased US consumer prices, while helping some exporters and import-competing industries.

In the latter part of 2008, some of these adverse forces reversed. Oil prices declined, the US dollar appreciated against some currencies (for example, the Canadian dollar and the euro), and

many commodity prices fell. Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures dropped significantly in December 2008, leaving little inflation over the last year.

Restoration of liquidity to financial markets with some restoration of trust among the participants must be the goal—progress is slow, with new revelations of fraud adding additional difficulties. Measuring the impact of economic stimulus on the level of trust seems beyond our current capacities. Ominous signs of new problems with consumer credit and corporate debt are appearing as well.

The US economy is still moving into a deep recession. Unemployment has exceeded 7 percent on its way to 8 percent or more. Declining output is expected for 2009 (–1.8 percent on an annual basis with the stimulus package) and a modest recovery in 2010. The new administration is expected to move vigorously, with stimulus of about 2 percent of GDP each year, or about \$400 billion per year for at least two years. Additional stimulus may be needed beyond 2010, particularly if the financial system continues with its problems. Their economic objectives will include: a reduction in the unemployment rate to below 6 percent as soon as possible, through job creation (about four million jobs by the end of 2010); improvements in real incomes of Americans; enhanced infrastructure; and progress on developing a “green” industry.

CANADA'S ECONOMY

Some institutions in Canada held subprime mortgage investments in US securitizations. More recently, we have found out that some of the same companies were invited into Canada in 2006 to sell their products here. According to the *Globe and Mail* (December 13, 2008), associated losses have not been identified so far.

In Canada, asset-backed commercial paper fell into disrepute in 2007, with

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people who thought they had a very secure asset for holding short-term funds discovering that these “bank-backed” instruments were not liquid and not backed. This market remains illiquid, with some resolution tantalizingly close in January 2009. Similar difficulties plague other financial instruments that had evolved over the past few years in many countries.

Canada’s economy is slowing down, with rising unemployment evident in November and December 2008 (70,000) and with an employment decline of 105,000 (seasonally adjusted), with 64,000 in Ontario. Further weakness is expected into 2009. Announcements of cutbacks pepper the media, while public officials add further words of caution.

Strong fiscal action in the form of a discretionary increase in the budget deficit is required. A discretionary stimulus in the form of lower taxes (higher transfers) and higher expenditures on goods and services by governments in the amount of about \$33 billion for 2009

and 2010 was delivered in the January 2009 budget. (This level meets the international commitments if it is interpreted as 2 percent over two years.) Additional stimulus is possible; however, some of the tools are in provincial and municipal hands or the private sector. Much of the infrastructure is to be put in place at provincial and local levels. Sharing mechanisms are in place and project lists are ready to go, although now the other levels of government are claiming to have no money. If more is needed, then there should be ideas for further stimulus worked out; if less is needed, then some actions can be terminated or phased out.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CANADIAN FEDERAL BUDGET

The Conservative federal budget has been accepted by the Liberals, at least for the time being. In any case, some forward thinking about another budget may be useful. The economic objectives should include: job creation sufficient to

reduce the unemployment rate below 6 percent as soon as possible; improvements in real incomes of Canadians; enhanced infrastructure; reduction in regional disparities; reduction in poverty; and improvements in retirement security.

SPECIFIC FEDERAL MEASURES

There are many possible actions that the government can pursue. Some are quicker acting; others have additional virtues (for example, infrastructure, green projects). Some tools can be easily reversed if conditions warrant, while others are likely to become permanent fixtures that will require new funding sources.

Targeted tax and transfer changes

Increasing disposable income for people with low and middle incomes would increase consumer expenditure and help residential construction, including repairs. Some measures that would serve that purpose include: old age security

TABLE 1 Actions in Other Countries: Fiscal Plans of G20

Country	Per year	% of GDP	Start	End	Features
<i>US</i>	\$400 billion	More than 5% over two years	2009	2010	Broad tax cuts; infrastructure
<i>EU</i>	€200 billion	1.5%	2009	2010	
<i>UK</i>	€23 billion		2009	2010	VAT cut; low wage tax cuts; infrastructure
<i>Spain</i>	€38 billion		2009	2010	Tax cuts and public works
<i>France</i>	€26 billion		2009	2010	Infrastructure speedup
<i>Italy</i>	€5 billion		2009	2010	Tax breaks for poorer households; delay tax payments for firms
<i>Germany</i>	€62 billion	1.3% per year	2009	2010	Tax and social levies cuts; additional spending on infrastructure
<i>Japan</i>	\$300 billion in 2008; \$111 billion in 2009	8%	2008	2009	Tax cuts; small business credits, cash to households; another \$144 billion for financial markets
<i>China</i>	2.6 trillion yuan	9% over two years	2009	2010	Infrastructure, health, and education
<i>Canada: Option I</i>	Restraint of \$5 billion	small	2008	2009	Reduced government expenditure; cut for political parties funding
<i>Canada: Option II</i>	Stimulus of \$50 billion	3.3% of GDP over two years	2009	2010	Tax cuts; expenditure increases

(OAS)—monthly payment for seniors of about \$6,000 per year, clawed back over a range of \$64,000 to \$104,000 (increase OAS by \$50 per month); GIS (Guaranteed Income Supplement)—seniors, income-tested monthly payment of about \$7,600 per year, with clawback at 50 percent of other income, excluding OAS (increase GIS by \$50 per month); and refundable sales tax credit—income-tested, with annual value of \$362 and clawed back at 5 percent, starting at about \$31,000.

The only specific measures in the January 2009 budget were: an increase in the National Child Benefit Supplement and Canada Child Tax Benefit to align the schedules for people with an income of \$25,000 to \$50,000; an increase in the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) from \$522 to \$925 for singles and from \$1,044 to \$1,680 for single parents and couples; and an increase in the Age Credit by \$1,000.

GST reduction by 2 percentage points

This could be implemented as a temporary measure for the period from the budget date to some time in the future. A review could determine whether an extension is needed. Otherwise it would be returned to at least 5 percent as of January 1, 2010. The direct fiscal cost of this measure is expected to be about \$10 billion per year. The GST sales tax credit will not be adjusted downward for this change, nor will it be adjusted upward when the rate is returned to its previous level.

Why this measure? It can be implemented quickly and immediately begins providing a benefit to everyone buying taxable goods and services. It will lower the CPI temporarily, easing the concerns of those worrying about inflation. The target is consumption and residential investment. It is universal, affecting everyone who spends on taxable goods. This is a plus factor for coverage and political support. However, it means the leakage into saving may be higher than some programs targeted on low-income families.

Delivery of any measure has administrative costs. Businesses will need to alter their computer programs and cash registers to accommodate the change, although they have had two recent requirements to lower the GST by 1 percentage point. Concerns are that people are not spending and this will help little. However, it is subsidizing spending, not saving. Others are concerned it will not be reversed, although it is an easy parameter in the tax system to change. (Recall that the rate was reduced from 7 percent to 6 percent and then to 5 percent.) In some parts of Atlantic Canada, the GST rate was increased to 13 percent for the harmonized sales tax (HST). Another wrinkle in implementation is to announce that the rate would be lowered and then increased back to a higher level, say, 7 percent, at a certain date, further encouraging people to speed up their spending now.

Personal income tax changes

The fundamental issue is the degree to which the changes should focus on the income distribution or on the total of disposable income of all Canadians. Potential items for discussion include: the definition of income—should capital gains receive special treatment, how should housing gains be treated, and what are the individual versus family concepts?—and donations to charities—should they be eliminated or increased?

For this budget, it is probably important to have a consistent message—namely, the desire to stimulate the economy through increased spending by Canadians. Note that in the United States, the closing of estate tax loopholes and other high-income improvements under Bush are going to be allowed to “run out” rather than closed up a year earlier. Aggressive moves to tighten the tax system will be in conflict with the stimulus message. The chosen change was an increase in the minimum income to pay tax and a widening of the brackets for the first two income classes. This provides a tax cut for everyone with income over \$10,000 with the maximum

absolute amount for those above about \$80,000.

Most budget measures were one time or limited to two years. This personal income tax change is described as “permanent” and defined for five years. This is consistent with the Conservative ideology of seeking permanent tax cuts whenever possible.

Improve the employment insurance program

Freezing contribution rates at current levels for the next two years—this will avoid the problem of increasing taxes at the time of a recession, and raising the price of hiring labour when the objective is to increase labour hiring. After the recession is over, there should be a review of the financing of the EI system as well as the benefits side. The budget froze the contribution rate at \$1.73 per \$100 for 2010, continuing the rate from 2009. From 2011, a new rate-setting mechanism is to be put in place.

Lengthening the benefit period—currently, the benefit period is a maximum of 45 weeks and is dependent on the unemployment rate of one’s location at the time of application for benefits. There is a matrix, as detailed in Schedule I of the *Employment Insurance Act*, that shows the maximum benefit period, by hours worked in the qualifying period and the unemployment rate of the claimant’s region. The budget took the modest step of raising the benefit period by five weeks.

Increasing coverage by reducing the number of hours to qualify—the EI “reforms” moved from the number of weeks worked to the number of hours. This decreased the number of eligible people, particularly those in the ranks of part time. Reducing the number of hours from 910 hours per year to 500 hours would remove some of the sting from the current program. No action was taken here in the 1989 budget.

Increasing coverage by including those who voluntarily quit a job—in the early 1990s, those who voluntarily quit employment were no longer able to

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access the EI program. This decision should be reversed, although some disincentive such as not receiving payment for the first four weeks of unemployment may be necessary for public acceptance. This measure is not about those who are actually unemployed by their actions alone. Rather, it also increases the power or choices available to someone working in an environment that is not a good workplace. No action was taken here in the 1989 budget.

Raising the benefit rate—raise the benefit rate to 70 percent of the median wage in the economy for those living in a family with children and 65 percent for everyone else. This income measure will be a positive stimulus to disposable income and should have a high marginal propensity to consume out of the incremental income. No action taken here in the 1989 Budget.

INCREASE INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING

Projects here could include: joint ventures with provincial and municipal governments; undertakings by the federal government in its areas of responsibility (airports, ports, military facilities, buildings); and community-sponsored projects with objectives of improving the environment, livability, and job creation. This could be in the form of one-time grants of \$1 million per project, with regional boards approving the projects.

Recent problems with federal bridges in Ottawa and Montreal are obvious targets. Improvements to the Windsor-Detroit bridges are another potential federal project. New runways, enhanced port facilities, and improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway are obvious opportunities for stimulus by changing the time profile of work. This is a major area for federal actions, with about \$21 billion in activity in 2009 and 2010, including about \$9 billion by provinces and local governments. If other governments do not cooperate, then the federal share could be diverted to other activities.

INCREASE GOVERNMENT GOODS AND SERVICES

Major wish lists should be at hand in every department. Cultural undertakings, improvements in handling immigrant cases, clients of Indian and Northern Affairs, military needs, the Coast Guard, etc., should all be on the list. Provincial and municipal transfers are always welcomed, with promises to spend. In the federal budget there is an increase in spending on training, R & D, tax credits for home renovation, and some social housing spending.

PROVINCIAL BUDGET ELEMENTS


The provinces are of comparable economic size to the federal government. Provincial own-account revenue was \$263 billion in 2007; local government—\$65 billion; federal government—\$246 billion. Their debt ratios are better than that of the federal government. The provinces guard their areas of responsibility—highways, education, health care, and social assistance. These areas represent targets for stimulative fiscal action.

Provincial governments could lower

their sales taxes by 2 percentage points to stimulate consumer spending and business investment, in line with the federal government. (Efforts to harmonize the system afterward could be fruitful as well.) Increases in social assistance by 10 percent would partially offset past cuts and stimulate the incomes of a group of people with high propensities to spend.

COSTING THE PROGRAMS

Informetrica Limited has recently updated its multiplier studies, providing estimates of the additional GDP, employment, and impacts on the fiscal balances for numerous tax and expenditure actions. Similar tables of multipliers appear in the budget document (p. 240). A separate study of the economic impact of the budget is available on request from Informetrica Limited.

As a general rule, fiscal stimulus should lead to a “fiscal dividend” to governments, lessening the impact on their budgets—about 25 to 40 percent of a fiscal action return to various levels of governments. 

See more writing by Daniel Drache at www.yorku.ca/drache/wto.php



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Lincoln's reincarnation

BY SETH FELDMAN

Seth Feldman is the director of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and a professor in the Department of Film at York University.

Cinema has provided us with a good many images of the African-American male transformed, in the words of one classic study, *From Sambo to Superspade*.

The rise of Barack Obama has raised the difficult question of how a majority of the American electorate was acclimated to the idea of an African-American president. It has also raised the more pressing question of how the various cultural filters used in this process continue to shape Obama's brand and hence the prerogatives that are politically possible for him.

So let's go to the movies. Cinema has provided us with a good many images of the African-American male transformed, in the words of one classic study, *From Sambo to Superspade*. That title, retrograde as it may be, still has a resonance in that there remains little in between the two extremes of negative stereotyping and reframing the black male as extraordinary. One might even say that it is the balancing of these doppelgangers within a single individual that itself has been Hollywood's lesson on the African-American experience.

ANSWERING RACIST SLANDER

Those of us of a certain age will remember the stirring climax of Stanley Kramer's 1967 film, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Poor Matt Drayton (played by Spencer Tracy), the perennial father of the bride, must decide whether he approves of his daughter's engagement to Dr. John Prentice (played by Sidney Poitier). Dr. Prentice, already known for his pioneering work in Africa, is wealthy, statesmanlike, and seemingly a shoo-in for a Nobel Prize. The daughter, on the other hand, seems to shop for a living. In no less solemn a tone than he displayed while delivering his verdict as a judge in the Nuremberg trials, Tracy rambles on interminably before finally giving his blessing to the marriage, stupid move that it might be. Whew.

Made only a few years after Obama's parents celebrated their marriage, Kramer's film not only drove another nail into the coffin of miscegenation laws but

also answered the ancient racist slander about black men's insatiable desire for white women. And it answered with a resounding "So what?" But there was also a third, perhaps inadvertent lesson taught by *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The film's climax made, in no uncertain terms, the point that the black man in America, no matter how accomplished, must still depend on the white man's acceptance. Great man that he was, Poitier's character couldn't just walk away from all the condescending blather.

DOUGLASS AND LINCOLN

Poitier's character in that regard is no more evolved than the picture Frederick Douglass painted of himself in an autobiography written nearly 100 years earlier. Douglass was the one African-American whom Abraham Lincoln held in high esteem. Lincoln, who famously declared he would have been willing to end the Civil War without freeing a single slave and who was far from immune to the racial prejudices of his day, declared Douglass to be not only the equal of his

white confidants but their superior. "Douglass," he said when meeting him at his second inaugural ball, "I saw you in the crowd today listening to my inaugural address. There is no man's opinion that I value more than yours; what do you think of it?"

Dr. Prentice and Douglass, activists though they may be, are reduced to passive characters, who can only be made acceptable through the agency of white observers. In an odd way, this is perhaps one of the reasons why there seemed to be so little concern about Obama's lack of experience. The experienced black man, who is merely as competent as, say, Mitt Romney, is of no interest to the American collective imagination. Only the extraordinary black man is worthy of the necessary consideration and approval.

OBAMA: A PUBLIC MAN

We learn this lesson again in the character of President Tom Beck as played by Morgan Freeman in Mimi Leder's 1998 film, *Deep Impact*. Although Beck is not Hollywood's only black president, he is fairly typical of the role. The film itself is about a huge space rock threatening the continued existence of life on earth. President Beck's job in the film is to make nationwide television addresses proclaiming the bad news. He is, in other words, a secondary character who has nothing to do with either the personal conflicts that parallel the apocalypse or the last-minute dramatic rescue of life on earth.

The character of President Beck speaks to another one of the mysteries of the Obama campaign: the frequent complaints about not being able to know anything about the man. Huh? Few candidates have done more to display themselves to the electorate. By the time anyone outside Illinois got to vote for him, Obama had published two autobio-

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A tale of two Obamas

Let me be up front. I am a pessimistic Optimist by nature about social and political change. A pessimistic optimist believes that successful social transformation is preceded by disruption, hopelessness, and even outright failure. If Barack Obama is going to fulfill the promise he held out to so many people in politically progressive and meaningful change-hungry circles, then I anticipate the only way to get there is through a painful two-step of failure and success. There will, by necessity, be two Obamas.

OBAMA AND THE POWER ESTABLISHMENT

The first Obama is the one we are watching as we begin 2009 and who is so disappointing to progressives. This Obama is turning to the Democratic Party power structure—refashioned during Bill Clinton’s term—and some Bush team members to guide his transition, populate his Cabinet, and propose ideas for the profound economic, social, and political problems that face the new president. We may not know for a while whether this recourse to the (mostly Democratic Party’s) usual suspects reflects payback for favours owed to the power elite, political instinct that the middle ground of American politics must be seized, or recognition that help from those with previous presidential-level experience is necessary and that the most palatable place to get it is the Clinton and Bush worlds—or, likely, a combination of all three.

Rather than guess at insider politics or bemoan the lack of genuinely progressive team members, I want to make plain what I think this recourse to the power establishment will mean for Obama’s administration in a very fundamental way. In a word, it means failure. These administrators and advisers will offer plans and policies that will likely fail in the face of the pressures that are at play on a global scale.

Why believe this? For the same reason that if your doctor prescribed a

BY ROBERT LATHAM

Robert Latham is the director of the Centre for International and Security Studies and a professor of political science at York University.

A pessimistic optimist believes that successful social transformation is preceded by disruption, hopelessness, and even outright failure.

medication that ended up harming you, you would not go back to the same doctor for more treatment. Even if that doctor stopped the harmful medication and came up with a new treatment—for both the original malady and the new medically induced one—you would be a fool to trust that she or he would not try to cover her or his tracks and would be able to get beyond the treatment framework that not only did not help you but harmed you.

THE POWER DILEMMA

We can see the first obvious weakness of the treatment framework that Obama is inheriting from his Clintonistas in his claim that he will focus on (especially economic) domestic issues—echoing Clinton’s mantra, “It’s the economy, stupid.” Any headway in the domestic realm is wholly dependent on developments in the global realm (as it was during Clinton’s time). No US economic recovery is possible without a coordinated global economic approach. An infrastructure spending program depends on countries such as China continuing to provide

credit to the United States; creating markets for US products depends on the existence of global demand for them; the profit and thereby the staffing needs of US transnational corporations depend not only on access to national economies worldwide but also economic activity within them; and any hope of reforming the very damaged international financial system depends on agreement among the major economic forces around the world.

All this we and they know. This is part of globalization. What is often taken for granted in a too economically focused approach to globalization is the importance of international politics. Karl Polanyi in his wonderful book, *The Great Transformation*, long ago in the 1940s made clear that developments in international politics and international economics shape one another: developments and conflict within international political structures can undermine unity within international economic structures and vice versa.

ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

The long 19th century of relatively peaceful cooperation among the European powers so important to international capitalism at the time came to a crashing halt, ending in the First World War. The fundamental conflict in the international system tied to imperialism was never overcome—that might have also allowed for meaningful responses to economic crises—until fundamental change was put in place after the Second World War. The implication is that jobs in Ohio depend on the Obama foreign policy team of Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates, and Susan Rice. But just as policy-makers from the late 19th century through the Second World War kept working with the same fundamental framework for organizing world order, this team has made clear that its job is to continue to work with the same US-centric framework for world order fashioned in the post-Second World War period: the same one

every president from FDR to Bush has worked with. Sometimes the modality shifts within it—more or less multilateral, more or less militaristic—but the framework remains the same.

MULTILATERALISM ISN'T ENOUGH

This framework is getting very long in the tooth: with the increasing influence of China, Russia, India, and Brazil; with developments in the European Union; with populations and some leaders in developing countries seeking a non-neoliberal US path toward change. The United States and Obama have every reason to avoid a serious commitment to order transformation and seek continuity, leaning of course toward a more multilateral and less militaristic approach.

Continuity means treating the Middle East as a problem of Israeli security; Central Asia as a matter of competition with Russia and China; the Asian subcontinent as a matter of treating both India and Pakistan as allies and as problems (potential competition from India, failing state in Pakistan); Latin America as a matter of consolidating markets and containing the Red Tide (Chavez et al.); Asia as a matter of facilitating Asian—especially Chinese—capitalist development and hindering its security ambitions, while protecting Japan; and Africa as a new security zone in competition with China. Throughout these regions the pursuit and securing of access to oil and resources more generally is a given.

BRINKMANSHIP AND CRISIS

Without a very significant global financial or political crisis—or even world war—fundamental transformation will not occur. But I think such a crisis is in formation. This is where the economic team comes in to play: Larry Summers, Timothy Geithner, Christina Romer, and Paul Volcker. Their job is to restore on reformed terms US global financial centrality: with the US dollar as a reserve currency; with Wall Street firms and US banks as key global players; with credit flowing freely to the United States; and

Without a very significant global financial or political crisis—or even world war—fundamental transformation will not occur.

with ancillary institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank fully operative. However, I expect their efforts to fail as the global economy drifts into deeper crisis because the neo-liberal-oriented US centrality they will try to save is a key factor that is producing the crisis in the first place—for which only a completely realigned and distributed credit and reserve system is the answer. And that failure will likely be accompanied by international political pressures just as Polanyi noted the crisis of the long 19th century was.

But at some point—even long before a second Obama term perhaps—the power elite surrounding Obama today will itself fall into crisis as it loses hope that it has the answers to mounting global pressures. This is when, history suggests, moments of openness appear: when the elite becomes divided and fragmented, and itself looks around

widely for answers. It is then that it—and we—will turn to Obama for an opportunity to explore new approaches to social organization and more broadly world order.

TAKING OUR CHANCES

What we may see is not a heroic FDR political figure relying on a new best and brightest team to rescue the world but rather a leader willing to open the structures of power to many voices, contentions, and frameworks from across the world. This Obama would contribute to the altering, recasting, or even replacement of those structures. These new structures would open space for broad-based and diverse dialogues regarding the social purposes of international economic and political institutions. They would establish a genuine commitment to aiding innovations in organizing local, national and global societies for the benefit of the billions whose lives are made profoundly insecure by the current structures of power.

That sort of turn would by its very nature be a success about which any progressive should feel optimistic. But western progressives will have to do their part: they will need to resist their own tendencies to offer solutions and ways forward long before the second Obama gets a chance to help open up the spaces of power and usher in not just new policies but systemic change—otherwise, we will end up with only one Obama. 🍁

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The end of the culture wars and the Obama presidency

FAIRWEATHER AMERICAN VOTERS

In a recent interview, one of America's most provocative public intellectuals, Cornel West, was wisely cautious about the long-term impact of Barack Obama's electoral victory: as an outsider to the establishment, Obama will be reluctant to "step out too far." Although inevitably caught up in the excitement of the moment and the groundbreaking election of a young African-American—a feat that could only be imagined one generation ago—West qualified that the hope embodied by Obama is "hope on a tightrope." It is hope that can be easily betrayed by a naive belief in the possibility of creating a genuinely democratic polity without the "messy" struggle and conflict that must, inevitably, take place to achieve it.

We cannot predict what will happen, but it is possible to diagnose the malaise in the United States, which Obama successfully tapped in to with the slogan, "Yes, we can." The enthusiasm of US voters was undoubtedly activated by the harsh realities of a recession, the prospect of diminishing expectations, rapidly dwindling resources, and fear in the face of the unpredictable—the inadequacy of health-care provision, inequality of income, and social and racial discrimination. What remains to be seen is whether the many people who were directly involved in the campaign or felt empowered by their vote will now retreat into the privacy of their homes. Or will their brush with politics lead to a much needed revitalization of the public sphere? Can Obama capitalize on the support of these diverse and divergent constituencies, which have not worked together previously? Will he be able to create a climate of creative debate that will overcome the unproductive deadlock resulting from rigid party ideologies and the entrenched practice of bargaining with powerful, self-serving interest groups?

BY NATTIE GOLUBOV

Nattie Golubov is a researcher at the Center for North American Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

[T]he hope embodied by Obama is "hope on a tightrope." It is hope that can be easily betrayed.

TWO NARRATIVES

The belief in possibility is an important factor in the constitution and political mobilization of collective identities. It is, after all, one of the fundamental ideas of what is identified as the American Dream. However, the sense that citizens can remake themselves also works more locally, where it serves as the inspiration for individuals who seek self-realization and, more often than not, upward mobility and economic independence.

Obama's journey to the White House is in many ways a new version of the stereotypical rags to riches story that fires the imagination of most American citizens and immigrants. But it can also be read as the culmination of another, related story—that of African-Americans and their extremely long struggle for equal treatment. Throughout his campaign, Obama drew upon both narratives and skillfully wove them together, and steeped them in history. Not only is he the son of a mixed marriage *and* a patriotic American, despite the years he spent abroad, he is an African-American who, despite many odds, successfully took advantage of the opportunities available to him in the United States. His personal story is one of moral and political progress. As a result, an extremely diverse audience could identify with the collec-

tive "we" that he invoked in his speeches, an admirable rhetorical strategy.

Obama comes across as a thoughtful, intellectual man who does not talk down to his audiences. He is young and he proved that he is in touch with cultural trends when he used new communication technologies and pop culture to reach a generation that acquires most of its information either through a mobile phone or the Internet. He belongs to the professional middle classes and is a liberal from the north; he is a religious man and a family man. Given his background, he is culturally bilingual and so can inhabit two cultures. He is well-travelled and so is not parochial. Even his lack of executive experience is an asset given the public's widespread distrust of institutions and politicians. It is therefore no surprise that he garnered the support of blacks, Hispanics and other racial and ethnic minorities, new voters of all kinds including young first-timers, churchgoers, white and black upper-middle-class professionals, and educated whites who are not threatened by the country's increasingly diverse racial and ethnic mix, among many others. Is it any wonder that Henry Louis Gates named him "our very first postmodern Race Man—a man who embraces his African cultural and genetic heritage so securely that he can transcend it, becoming the candidate of choice to tens of millions of Americans who do not look like him."

AN INEVITABLE BACKLASH?

But, hope is one thing and reality is another. Obama, currently a figure of inspiration and promise, is intent on tackling several generation-spanning causes: the economic crisis and a new energy economy, health care, climate change, civil liberties, and diplomacy. Indeed, polls that measure emotional reactions to the presidential election and the confidence inspired by the outcome demonstrate the extent to which voters


are emotionally invested in the idea of him. Unfortunately, there are issues here that may not be resolved because they have greater staying power.

Cornel West is confident that there will be a white backlash and, I would add, there could be a conservative one as well, especially around cultural and social problems that are invariably contentious in the United States—Xenophobia comes in many shapes and forms, such as abortion, gay rights, women's rights, and the contents of school curricula, perhaps even immigration laws, civil liberties, and environmental issues. All of these invariably give rise to emotionally charged disagreements that seem to be interminable because the moral beliefs and world views from which they are understood and justified are incommensurable. For example, despite optimistic claims that the United States is now "post-racial," one man's

appointment will not end racial tension, resentment, or discrimination, and the recent referendum banning gay marriage in California—where Obama won with an overwhelming majority—provides another example. These cleavages will continue to divide the nation. These kinds of local conflicts will not go away despite Obama's intention of creating a flexible, bipartisan coalition in Washington. The values and beliefs with which people conduct their lives do not necessarily correspond to either party politics or institutional agendas.

THE ROUT OF NEO-CONSERVATIVE PUBLIC CULTURE

The looming question is whether the new president will be capable of narrowing "the gap between the promise and the reality," to use his own words. Perhaps for the present what matters is what

he represents. Given the widespread skepticism concerning politicians, lobbyists, and corporate America, the figure of the president has a moral authority that is baffling in other countries. If we read the election results as a referendum on the exhaustion of conservative ideas, Obama to a large extent won on the strength of his ideas. Let us hope that his arrival in Washington will usher in an era of careful reflection, auto-critique, and innovation both within the White House and elsewhere to fulfill the social and economic expectations of an increasingly complex and changing society. 

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graphical bestsellers, sat through a thousand interviews, and placed rationales for his policies on a sprawling website. What part of him was missing?

It was, I would suggest, the Tom Beck part—that is, the familiar, comforting, liberal Democrat leader of the free world who happens to be black. Where was the centrist, accommodating black president from central casting that had been previously imagined when Hollywood or anyone else wished to fantasize a black president? Certainly, it wasn't the kid with an Islamic name from a broken, interracial marriage who was also president of the *Harvard Law Review* and, after 2004, an unstoppable force. What we kept looking for and couldn't find in Obama was that comfortable, dull Hollywood cliché.

THE AFRO-AMERICAN SUPERHERO

This brings us to our third film, the one in which Obama truly stars. The movie he is in, I would suggest, is Peter Berg's 2008 release, *Hancock*. In that story, Will

Smith plays not a president but rather a down and out African-American superhero of the faster-than-a-speeding-bullet variety. He drinks too much, eats with his hands, and passes out on park benches. When he does do his superhero thing, he causes as much mayhem as he prevents. The good citizens of Los Angeles, while naturally enough expecting the services of a superhero, are getting fed up with him.


Hancock (a name that seems to have been chosen for an American political year) is redeemed when a down-on-his-luck public relations agent takes on the task of resuscitating his image. As in most American films of this ilk, broad comedy ensues, and everyone learns a little lesson about what is really important.

Why is this the Obama story? It is because today, American film has finally engaged the extreme clichés about African-American males: their physical prowess working unpredictably for good and evil (think Mike Tyson); their image problems, often self-induced by the fear of their own achievements; the white

community's need for them to be adequate by becoming exemplary.

BEYOND THE CLICHÉS

And just as American film has confronted these clichés, so has Obama. When the *New Yorker* published its infamous satirical cover in the middle of the campaign, it was depicting the image that Obama, thanks to the right-wing propagandists, might have had but didn't. He didn't because it was cancelled out by the other satirical image—that of the perfect if ethereal Obama that one saw, for instance, in the widely distributed JibJab cartoon (http://sendables.jibjab.com/originals/time_for_some_campaignin).

All that remained for a president who thinks he is Lincoln—and may well be right—was to look out over his inaugural crowd and pick out his own Frederick Douglass. That wasn't protective glass around him; it was a mirror. For with the demands Obama is making and with his assertion of his right to judge others, this Lincoln's Frederick Douglass is the rest of us. 

Race and Joe Sixpack in the US presidential elections

SPINNING THE FACTS

Was former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani right when interviewed on National Public Radio the morning after Senator Barack Obama won the Democratic nomination? “Voters don’t vote on the issues, they vote on personality.” Or would American voters prefer to drown in a sea of economic, social, and diplomatic disasters than be rescued because the captain at the helm is deemed of the wrong race? What has happened to electoral politics that leads voters to choose the candidate who makes them feel more comfortable culturally than the candidate who can best handle the job? Yet, when asked, voters firmly assert that they have elected the most capable person to office.

Beginning with the 1980 presidential election campaign, the Republican Party ruthlessly pursued a political strategy of cognitive dissonance in order to wrest political control from the Democratic Party. Essentially communication persuasion techniques and propaganda, the politics of cognitive dissonance not only secured political dominance for the Republican Party, but also bifurcated and polarized the body politic along cultural lines (religion, abortion, gay rights, and race). Politics of cognitive dissonance unravelled the heretofore secularized policy process, causing partisan gridlock

BY MARILYN LASHLEY

Marilyn Lashley is a professor of political science at Howard University, Washington, DC.

[P]olitical spin usually involves disinformation, distortion, and deception.

in legislative decision making and failures of governance from the Bush administration’s promulgation of war in Iraq and the political firings of eight Department of Justice lawyers to the abrogation of international law with respect to extraordinary rendition and torture.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY AND POLITICS

Cognitive dissonance, as Leon Festinger wrote in 1957, describes one’s need to establish consistency between one’s dispositions to act or behave (attitudes) and one’s beliefs and opinions. People will modify an existing belief or reject contradictory ideas when their behaviour is inconsistent with their attitudes in order to accommodate the discrepant behaviour by eliminating dissonant cognitions or adding new consonant cognitions. The most frequently used dissonance reducers include: denial (rejecting a fact too discomfoting to accept—“it didn’t happen”); dialectics (synthesizing opposing assertions or repeating contradictory/false assertions as true); non-denial (using words that are literally true to convey a false impression); and spin.

Often a derogatory term used in pub-

lic relations, “spin” is the act of presenting a biased portrayal by selecting or manipulating facts to advantage a person or situation. Although public relations relies on creative presentation of the facts, political spin usually involves disinformation, distortion, and deception. Politicians and strategists often are accused of “spinning the facts” by commentators and political opponents when they produce a counterargument or position. Spin techniques include: cherry picking (selectively presenting facts and quotes that support one’s position); “non-denial denial”; making statements that assume unproven truths; and using euphemisms (code words or double-speak) in place of words considered too harsh, politically incorrect, or offensive for public statements.

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

The overly long 2008 primary season produced two dissimilar nominees with distinctly different platforms vying for the office of president of the United States: Republican Senator John McCain and Democratic Senator Barack Obama. Abetted by the media and led by Karl Rove, Republican strategists employed the politics of cognitive dissonance to divert voters’ attention from accurately assessing the candidates’ actual differences on policy issues by reinventing the records and credentials of both candidates and reducing good governance to voters’ attitudes on abortion, gay rights, race, and religion—in short, cultural identity.

Observers watched as media journalists and political strategists transformed voters’ views of Senator Obama from a “post-racial” or “a-racial” politician that more middle-class white voters found appealing than African-American voters

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into “the black candidate,” despite these voters’ misgivings about Obama’s “blackness” given his biracial origin and white upbringing. Until March 2008, most media coverage of Obama focused on his viability among African-American voters. Many asked whether Obama was “black enough” because he was perceived as representing mainstream issues rather than issues important to racial minorities. Consequently, Obama significantly trailed Hillary Clinton in support among African-Americans unconvinced of his ability to advance their interests until former president Bill Clinton’s racial gaffes on the eve of the South Carolina primary.

THE BATTLE FOR JOE SIXPACK

After African-American voters shifted their support in response to the Clintons’ contentious introduction of race into the campaign, Hillary Clinton strategists launched a “no holds barred” and “everything is fair game” attack on Obama. It targeted white, blue-collar voters in western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and West Virginia using euphemisms, fear, and cultural divisions of race, religion, class, and gender. When it became clear that Obama would secure the nomination, Republican strategists seized the Clinton gauntlet and “playbook,” employing code words, double entendre—“the working class,” “Real Americans,” “Joe Sixpack” aka gun-toting, white men—and dialectics that distorted Obama’s ethnicity as Arab Muslim and his membership in a church whose pastor preaches liberation theology as radical nationalism.

The McCain campaign promulgated an onslaught of negative ads that reinvented Senator McCain as the non-elitist, pro-life, anti-immigration conservative maverick and Senator Obama as the inexperienced, elitist, liberal, terrorist sympathizer who could not be trusted. Post-nomination, McCain became the “change candidate” who “put country first,” appropriating Obama’s bottom-up, “Yes we can,” “One America,” hope-for-change vision of American that the Clintons had dubbed “fairlyland.”

Voters desired change and inclusiveness and voted for Obama in order to reclaim US foreign policy stature and, most important, to halt economic decline.


THE SUBDUED TIDAL WAVE

The actual role that race would play in the 2008 Presidential election was difficult to ascertain. Many African-Americans believed race was a potent factor evidenced by racial euphemisms: Obama’s “elitism,” “unflappable personality,” inexperience, white voters’ orthodoxy on “flag lapel pins” and “the *real* American people.” Assessing white voters’ perceptions was more difficult. On the record, pollsters found support for black candidates overstated because white voters are reluctant to admit racially tinged sentiments—the Bradley effect. In an interview with *New York Times* journalist Adam Nagourney, Michigan Republican Chairman Saul Anuzis said, “He’s become accustomed to whispered asides from voters suggesting they would not vote for Mr. Obama because he is black . . . [but] we honestly don’t know how big an issue it is.

Harold Ickes, a Hillary Clinton campaign strategist, admitted, “If he were white, this would be a blowout. I think the country has come a long, long, long way since the 1960s . . . but if you talk to people in certain states, they will say [it is] because of the color of his skin.” In a study of campaign media coverage by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, Robert Lichter noted a major turnaround in coverage for Obama after McCain and Obama emerged as front-runners in the early primaries. Obama’s on-air evaluations shifted from 62 percent positive to 28 percent positive and 72 percent nega-

tive, significantly worse than John McCain’s 43 percent positive and 57 percent negative.

Foremost, women Democrat voters viewed the election as a referendum on the American Dream—President George W. Bush’s tribalization of American politics—the choice between “voters who want to keep the Dream for a few and those who want to spread the Dream around.” According to one northeastern Women’s Democratic Club president, “two-thirds of women who supported Hillary shifted to Barack” and “Palin’s selection as McCain’s running mate alienated Republican women, especially working class women, shifting them to Obama as well.” Club polls indicated that Republican women were also crossing over to Obama because of his positions on wages, reproductive rights, and gender. This trend was substantiated in October 2008 polling by the *Wall Street Journal*/NBC and other organizations that showed support for McCain stimulated by Governor Palin’s entry slipping among working class women voters.

Despite the polarizing politics of cognitive dissonance, Barack Hussein Obama won the 2008 US presidential election. After polling places closed on election day, there was little evidence of either a Bradley effect or a PUMA (Party Unity, My Ass) movement of Hillary Clinton supporters abandoning the Democratic Party. Voters crossed over to Obama in increasing numbers as the economy melted down, Sarah Palin’s qualifications proved vulnerable, and the McCain campaign faltered and winnowed its own base. Many “post-machine” and machine Democrats, and Independents of all races, voted for Obama primarily because of his stances on the policy issues. Voters desired change and inclusiveness and voted for Obama in order to reclaim US foreign policy stature and, most important, to halt economic decline. Horace Mann, an educator and statesman who entreated on the obligation of citizen voters to vote the issue and the candidate, would be pleased by voters’ performance in the 2008 US presidential election. 

Obama's Web 2.0 presidency

Barack Obama's successful election campaign has been proclaimed as momentous for many reasons, not least of which is the exploitation of digital media. Although previous campaigns have made use of the Internet and cellphones, Obama's innovation was to combine them with Web 2.0 technologies, like Facebook and Twitter, to mobilize vast communities of local volunteers and micro-fundraisers around a common cause.

A DEVOLUTION OF POWER?

Digital media—which include the global Internet, cellphones, and consumer electronic devices—infiltrate and give shape to every aspect of society, economics, and politics today. They are small, portable, and increasingly mobile. There are roughly 3.2 billion mobile phones in the world, with the highest growth rates occurring in the developing world. They are also global, not only carried through the vectors of business, social, and military networks, but also percolating from below through spontaneous grassroots development and individual ingenuity.

For years, theorists have grappled with the social and political consequences of digital media. Are they flattening power structures? Are they bringing about the end of sovereignty? Are they empowering individuals? Does the Obama campaign, and other innovative uses of social networking like it, represent a radical new devolution of power? The thesis put forth here is much less linear and tidy. The consequences for world politics of digital media penetration are mixed, chaotic, often contradictory, and therefore turbulent.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF CYBERSPACE—STATES STILL MATTER

It was once widely believed that states are too rigid, hierarchical, and cumbersome to control flows of digital media.

BY RONALD J. DEIBERT

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Digital media—which include the global Internet, cellphones, and consumer electronic devices—infiltrate and give shape to every aspect of society, economics, and politics today.

That assumption has not been shared by many states themselves, especially in recent years. After 9/11, the methods and tools of “hard politics” entered into the soft power realm of digital media. The digital media environment emerged as a battlefield, fought within and across each of its spheres, from physical infrastructure, to code, to the cognitive realm of ideas. Dozens of states routinely block access to information deemed strategically, culturally, or political threatening, and these blockages are often timed to coincide with key political events, such as elections. The methods employed range from filtering software installed at key Internet chokepoints and gateways, to computer network attacks, to the strategic propagation of malware and disinformation through open channels.

Often operating deep within the subterranean infrastructure of the Net, without transparency and accountability, these methods have as their ultimate aim the shaping of the ideasphere, a borderless and amorphous realm. The ancient art of propaganda has morphed from a strategic appendage to the centrepiece

of 21st-century military strategy. Ideas are the object of geopolitical contestation, as much as natural resources and territory have been in the past, with much greater attention paid to techniques of persuasion, psychological operations, and viral marketing for military strategic ends. Because the geopolitics of digital media are inherently transnational, states' information-warfare activities are themselves internationalized, and thus (ironically) are contributing to the unbundling of the sovereignty paradigm.

DISTRIBUTED INGENUITY—CAN BE MALICIOUS TOO

State acts of cyber warfare described above are highly chaotic, volatile, and inherently unpredictable, in part because of the distributed nature of the digital media environment itself. It is well known that the Internet exhibits great complexity; its structure effectively empowers users at end points or edges of the networks. Given the seamlessly linked character of these networks, innovation at these edge locations can have system-wide effects. The system as a whole is thus dynamic and occasionally turbulent. Although states may seed cyber warfare campaigns, the campaigns have a tendency to take on a life of their own because of the unavoidable participation of multiple actors swarming from edge locations, as evidenced in Estonia, Georgia, Tibet, Burma, Pakistan, and elsewhere.

The most recent conflict between Hamas and Israel offers a case in point. The Israeli Defense Forces' campaign has been highly influenced by the lessons learned from the 2006 war with Hezbollah, particularly the need to ensure that the public relations part of the battle—control of the ideasphere—was not lost. Telecommunication networks and cellular towers were targeted as part of the IDF incursion into Gaza, and foreign journalists cordoned off to limit outside access. Such methods can-

not prevent distributed acts of swarming, however, on both sides of the conflict. For example, members of a Moroccan-based hacking group called “TEAM-Evil” infiltrated the database of the official Israeli domain registrar, DomaintheNet. This gave them the ability to alter the name servers of several important Israeli websites, including the popular Israeli online news service, YnetNews.com, redirecting its traffic to a page containing pro-Hamas information.

Tens of thousands of Israeli websites were defaced by individuals and groups based in Turkey, Lebanon, and Iran, among others. On the other side of the conflict, a group of Israeli computer science students created a website advertising a downloadable Trojan horse that allows users all over the world to “turn over” their PCs to control servers that in turn employ them to execute distributed denial-of-service attacks on Hamas-related websites. Their website claimed that several thousand users signed up. However much the parties to a conflict try to manage the idea-zone to suit their strategic aims, swarms of groups and individuals intervene, leading to unpredictable and potentially highly chaotic outcomes.

FLATTENED, FUSED, AND MONITORED

The distributed ingenuity described above has led many to believe that one clear consequence of digital media is the empowerment of individuals and grassroots organizations at the expense of more hierarchical centres of power, such as states and corporations—a kind of “flattening” of power, to borrow a phrase popularized by the journalist Thomas Friedman. Flattened power is derived, in part, from the platforms of Web 2.0 and 3.0, including ubiquitous, distributed, and sharable computing systems and databases, social networking platforms, three-dimensional shared spaces (for example, Second Life), open protocols, and “intelligent” applications that allow for machine learning and exploitation of the semantic web. The thesis is dramatically illustrated by numerous examples

The domain of digital media is being militarized and mined at the same time as it is exploding with ingenuity and grassroots empowerment.

of grassroots advocacy campaigns, new electoral strategies, and coordinated mass mobilizations, including Obama’s dramatic election victory referred to above.

However, the flattened power thesis needs to be qualified in several important ways. First, many of the Web 3.0 platforms are serviced by third-party private intermediaries on so-called cloud computing systems in an oligopolistic market dominated by a few large Internet service companies, like Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft. These companies sit on top of, and thus control, vast rivers of data, which they can then archive, fuse, recommercialize, and mine. Because many of their operations cross territorial boundaries and include jurisdictions that do not respect human rights or the rule of law, the consequences of the storage of this data can be profound and disempowering. For example, a recent report uncovered a massive surveillance system on the Chinese version of the popular networking phone system Skype, which was operated by the company in collusion with the Chinese government. Millions of encrypted chat messages and phone numbers and other personal

details were uploaded and stored onto insecure servers in China, to be shared with the Chinese public security bureau. Revelations such as these can create anxious and insecure publics who lack trust in digital media because of the lack of transparency and accountability. Self-censorship and political restraint can become the norm.

Second, and related, traditional centres of power, such as state intelligence agencies, are effectively exploiting the very same intelligent tools and distributed databases to monitor the activities of individuals. These efforts are enhanced by rapid advances in data mining, fusion, and visualization tools as well as the voluminous amount of personal information that is voluntarily supplied by the individuals using the social networking platforms. Today’s job of mass surveillance is thus enhanced dramatically by the extent to which users willingly upload images, videos, and updates of their daily lives, all cross-referenced, geographically fixed, and individually tagged, and thus ripe for picking by both public audiences and determined private actors.

THE GLOBAL VILLAGE—COMPRESSED

The domain of digital media is being militarized and mined at the same time as it is exploding with ingenuity and grassroots empowerment. This suggests a highly volatile mix of power politics, but one that operates in multiple jurisdictions simultaneously and involves both public and private actors, all at an extremely high rate of speed. While the Obama campaign and other innovative uses of digital media are remarkable, the geopolitical battles over and through digital media have not disappeared and power still matters. 🍁

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Fighting for human rights: Obama's big agenda

THE INHERITANCE

The eight-year presidency of George W. Bush was marked by a systematic recourse to unilateralism, coupled with an asymmetrical free trade policy. He leaves an open front in Afghanistan, a lack of commitment with regard to the challenge posed by climate change, a chaotic situation in Iraq, a situation in Israeli-Palestinian relations that can at best be described as a deteriorating status quo, a planetary economic instability, and a deterioration of human rights brought about by the adoption of anti-terrorism legislation affecting civil rights, the building of a wall separating Mexico from the United States, and the justification and legalization of torture. All of this has contributed to the influence of the United States being questioned throughout the world, including by its closest allies. Two landmark international pronouncements, issued during the Bush presidency—the Avena decision, rendered by the International Court of Justice, and the advisory opinion on the rights of undocumented migrants delivered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights—further highlight the shortcomings of the official American view of human rights. This topic will therefore be at the forefront of both

BY ERIC TARDIF

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domestic and foreign policy as President Obama tries to repair America's image on the international stage.

The issue that has caused the highest level of controversy internationally—and in which Canada has a vested interest because of the Khadr file—has undoubtedly been the policy regarding the so-called war on terror. Three topics stem from this: Guantanamo, torture, and civil rights.

IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF CLOSING GUANTANAMO

Although the decision has already been made by Obama to shut down the prison at Guantanamo, the ensuing dilemma has both a legal and a practical aspect. The first has to do with the possible alternatives to the highly criticized system of military commissions prosecuting the detainees. Some favour the idea of carrying out the judicial processes in a

regular federal court; others would prefer the creation of a special “terrorism or national security court”—a cross between a military tribunal and a federal court, designed to handle highly sensitive intelligence material. However, in that jurisdiction, subjects could not receive the full range of criminal protections because allowing a detainee to invoke the violation of his right to a speedy trial, the fact that he was never read his Miranda rights, or that his confession was obtained through the use of coercive methods would clearly jeopardize the prospect of a conviction. The constitutionality of such a hybrid jurisdiction would undoubtedly be challenged.

The practical side of the Guantanamo predicament has to do with the question of relocation of the suspects to be put on trial: they probably could not be kept either with regular criminal or military detainees, and so the decision that the Obama administration takes on where to hold them in custody will almost certainly spark controversy. But the plot thickens: more than 100—out of the 250 detainees—will probably never be tried because there is little or no evidence linking them to terrorism. Some of those individuals are, in some way, as opposed to their own government as they are to the American government and are often considered a liability in their respective countries, some of which have already stated that they will refuse to take them back. More problematic still, human rights advocates warn that the citizens of China, Libya, Russia, and Tunisia, for example, face possible ill-treatment by their national authorities if they are sent back. Housing them in the United States or granting them asylum would prove to be a highly sensitive issue.

The methods used to obtain evidence and confessions in the war on terror, especially the practice known as “water-

At home, President Obama will have the tough task of determining how to balance the need for American society to live free from the menace of terrorism on the one hand, with the imperative to respect as much as possible the individual rights already jeopardized by the USA Patriot Act and the Protect America Act.

boarding”—aimed at reproducing the sensations associated with the fear of drowning—as well as other “enhanced” interrogation techniques, have drawn strong condemnation even among America’s closest allies, who are unwilling to rely on the assurance by US authorities that those practices have ceased. Even if Obama decides to clearly outlaw the use of torture by the CIA, he will have to take a stand on these practices being carried out by his allies, and address the conundrum posed by the secret prisons still believed to be operating at least in Jordan, Syria, and Morocco.

At home, President Obama will have the tough task of determining how to balance the need for American society to live free from the menace of terrorism on the one hand, with the imperative to respect as much as possible the individual rights already jeopardized by the *USA Patriot Act* and the *Protect America Act*.

OTHER BIG DECISIONS LIE AHEAD

The backbone of Obama’s electoral program with regard to addressing the great global challenges has been multilateralism. Implementing this shift in policy will be key to tackling other sensitive topics, such as the withdrawal from Iraq and its implications for hundreds of thousands of refugees, or the situation in Darfur. Obama is committed to signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and a decision to do the same, for example, in the case of the Convention on the Rights of the Child could be seen as a further sign of openness to multilateralism. A position favouring access in poor countries to generic versions of US-patented drugs in the fight against serious illnesses would send a similar message.

On a more local level, immigration will have to be a priority for the new administration, as Obama has announced he will work toward the betterment of the policy in place, including the commitment to keeping families together, which should be reflected in the much anticipated thawing of relations with Cuba. This

The social, cultural, and political marks left by a decade or more of conservatism constitute a legacy that is hard to overturn in the short run, especially considering the grim financial situation the new president inherits.

will also involve a close relationship with Mexican authorities. It is complicated by the fact that the new president favoured the bill creating the border wall aimed at stopping the flow of illegal immigrants coming into the United States.

Obama will also have to consider the restructuring of the US asylum system, deemed to be unfair and inadequate to process the myriad of applications. On the subject of access to health care—a very basic human right—Obama has promised to deliver a new system that will enable the more than 50 million people that remain uncovered—14 million of them of Latin American descent—to be insured. The president will also have to look into the rise in the number of hate crimes, as well as the racial disparities that characterize the justice system. It is, however, unlikely that Obama will budge on the issue of the elimination

of the death penalty in the case of federal crimes.

FROM “YES WE CAN” TO “YES WE DID”: THE CHALLENGE

The election of Obama has to be interpreted as a relevant shift, but it doesn’t constitute a revolution: those who have foreseen radical, profound, and decisive mutations have not grasped the American reality and its policy limitations. The social, cultural, and political marks left by a decade or more of conservatism constitute a legacy that is hard to overturn in the short run, especially considering the grim financial situation the new president inherits. Patience and audacity will be essential ingredients to the realization of the change the people who voted for him yearn for. Time will tell how efficient and suitable the new implemented policies turn out to be. 🍀

How Canada's highest court has given security certificates a red light

CANADA'S TOUGH RESPONSE TO 9/11

After the horrors of September 11, 2001 both Canada and the United States, with very little legislative debate and almost no public discussion, passed draconian new security measures, the *Anti-terrorism Act* in Canada and the *Patriot Act* in the United States. In June 2002, with the passage of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), security certificate cases for both permanent residents and foreign nationals were dealt with before a single judge in the Federal Court of Canada. Canada has used security certificates—first under the *Immigration Act* and more recently under the IRPA—to deport permanent residents or foreign nationals from Canada who the government claims are inadmissible on grounds of security, violating human or international rights, serious criminality, or organized criminality. The deportation process commences and the person is arrested once the immigration minister and the minister of public safety sign a security certificate.

Prior to the passage of the IRPA, security certificates involving permanent residents had been dealt with before the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC), and the cases involving foreign nationals were dealt with before a single judge of the Federal Court of Canada. The lawyers involved in these cases have long argued, without success, that the security certificate process was unfair and that it violated the provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The subject of the certificate, and his or her counsel, would only receive a summary of the case, cleansed entirely of any matters that the government claimed would endanger national security.

In 1996, an application for leave to appeal from the Federal Court of Appeal

BY PAUL COPELAND

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Canada has used security certificates—first under the *Immigration Act* and more recently under the IRPA—to deport permanent residents or foreign nationals from Canada who the government claims are inadmissible on grounds of security, violating human or international rights, serious criminality, or organized criminality.

was brought before the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Ahani* case. Mr. Ahani had been ordered deported from Canada pursuant to a security certificate. Justice McGillis of the Federal Court had found that the certificate issued against Mr. Ahani was reasonable. In a very poorly reasoned decision, she rejected the argument that the security certificate procedure violated the fundamental justice requirements of s. 7 of the Charter. The Federal Court of Appeal agreed with her

reasoning. The Supreme Court of Canada refused Ahani's application for leave to appeal. As is the custom in applications for leave to appeal before the Supreme Court of Canada, the Court gave no reasons for refusing the application.

SECURITY CERTIFICATE CASES RELATED TO AL-QAEDA

With the McGillis decision in *Ahani* providing judicial cover, between 1999 and 2003 the government of Canada began efforts to remove from Canada five men of Arabic background who the government claimed were connected to al-Qaeda or similar terrorist organizations. Mahmoud Jaballah, Hassan Almrei, Mohammad Majoub, Mohamed Harkat, and Adil Charkaoui were all made subjects of security certificates. Mr. Almrei has now been in jail for more than seven years while the government tries to remove him from Canada (on January 2, 2009, Federal Court Justice Mosley released a decision holding that Mr. Almrei would soon be released). The other four men spent various long periods of time in custody and are now out on very restrictive terms of bail awaiting the resolution of their cases.

It is very doubtful that the federal national security agencies or the Department of Justice were aware of the impact of undertaking five security certificate cases at the same time. Very effective organizing and community work was done by the Committee to End Secret Trials, by Amnesty International, and by a number of NGOs from the Arab community. Counsel for Adil Charkaoui challenged the constitutionality of the legislation before Justice Noel of the Federal Court.

When the challenge was unsuccessful on that application they appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal. A more narrowly focused constitutional chal-

lenge to the security certificate procedure under the fundamental justice provisions in s. 7 of the Charter was brought before Justice Dawson in the *Harkat* case. Justice Dawson relied on the decision of the Federal Court of Appeal in *Charakaoui* and dismissed the constitutional challenge. In what I regard as a display of legal arrogance, counsel for the government made no attempt to justify the denial of fundamental justice in the security certificate procedure by calling evidence under s. 1 of the Charter.

SECURITY CERTIFICATE PROCEDURES REVIEWED BY THE SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

Counsel for Mr. Almrei brought a constitutional challenge against the bail provisions of the security certificate procedure. Mr. Almrei was unsuccessful on that challenge before Justice Blanchard and before the Federal Court of Appeal. However, much to the surprise of the lawyers involved, the Supreme Court of Canada granted leave to appeal on the constitutional issue, first in the *Charakaoui* case and later in the *Harkat* and *Almrei* cases. All three cases were scheduled to be argued together in June 2006.

By the time leave to appeal was granted by the Supreme Court of Canada, many legal groups had spoken out against the security certificate procedures, including the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Federation of Law Societies, the Criminal Lawyers' Association, Human Rights Watch, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, and the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Toronto Law Faculty. All of these groups were granted intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada. Other intervenors supporting the appeals were the Canadian Counsel for Refugees, the African Canadian Legal Clinic, the National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, the Canadian Arab Federation, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Canadian Muslim Civil Liberties Association. The only intervenor on the government side was the attorney general of Ontario.

By the time leave to appeal was granted by the Supreme Court of Canada, many legal groups had spoken out against the security certificate procedures.

The case was argued over two days in the middle of June 2006. Judgment was reserved, and on February 23, 2007 the unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada was released. The Court ruled that the procedure followed to determine whether or not the security certificate was reasonable violated section 7 of the Charter. The Court held that the persons named in the certificates were denied fundamental justice in that they did not know the case they had to meet. The Court also struck down the bail provisions of the security certificate procedure as they related to foreign nationals who were not permanent residents of Canada. With regard to the fundamental justice aspect of the decision, the Court suspended its ruling for one year and, in effect, ordered the government to draft new legislation that complied with the fundamental justice provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

By the time the Supreme Court of Canada decided the case, Stephen Harper was the prime minister of Canada and Stockwell Day was the minister of public safety. They were very slow in introducing new legislation in the House of Commons to amend the security certificate provisions of the IRPA. It was not until October 2007 that the legislation was introduced, and not until February 2008 that the amended legislation got to the Senate.

The Senate committee heard from government witnesses with respect to the new legislation passed by the House of Commons. Another day, at the end of eight hours of hearings, the members of that Senate committee in effect held their noses and passed the legislation. The amended legislation came into effect at the end of February 2008, and on that same day five new security certificates were issued, in effect continuing the deportation attempts against the five men of Arab origin.

DEPORTATION TO TORTURE OR DEATH

It is beyond the scope of this article to deal extensively with the issue of possible deportation to torture or death. Section 115 of the IRPA, somewhat in line with the Supreme Court of Canada decision in the *Suresh* case, allows for the possibility of deporting someone from Canada to a country where it is possible that he will be tortured or killed. The IRPA provides that a decision about possible return to torture will be made by a delegate of the immigration minister. In the cases of the five men, a number of decisions have been made to return them to their homeland.

The decisions made by the minister's delegate have so far amounted to a rubber-stamp approval of the position taken by Immigration Canada. No minister's delegate has said that it is inappropriate to send the men back to their home country. Almost all of those decisions have been overturned by the Federal Court and sent back to the government for amendment and redrafting in conformity with the Federal Court ruling.

SPECIAL ADVOCATES

Prior to the time that the amendments to the security certificate provisions of the IRPA were passed in February 2008, the government of Canada commenced the process of receiving applications from people who wanted to be approved as special advocates in the security certificate hearings. Generally speaking, to be

Repairing the broken US immigration system

The movement of people and goods between Mexico and the United States began taking place regularly long before either of these two countries emerged as sovereign nations. And once the current border was established in 1848, routine flows to exchange goods and visit family and friends on “the other side” continued. Large-scale labour migration was set in motion during the *bracero* program (1942–1964), but it was mainly male and circular. However, some of the contacts and patterns established then were maintained, and a small but steady trickle of undocumented Mexican workers ensued.

Over the past two to three decades, this ongoing migration has been marked by significant quantitative and qualitative changes. Circular migration has given way to long-term settlement as more and more labour migrants have sought to reunite their families north of the border. More single as well as married women have joined the migratory flow to seek work in the United States.

THE EXPANDING MIGRANT LABOUR FORCE

Industrial and economic restructuring in the United States has eliminated many well-paying manufacturing jobs. Nevertheless, until recently, employment opportunities for relatively low-skilled and low-paid workers in both services and construction rose significantly. At the same time, economic restructuring and modernization implemented in Mexico created a large supply of redundant labour. Hence, many of Mexico’s unemployed or underemployed and underpaid workers sought to better their lot by migrating to the United States. Mexico has thus become an important source of cheap labour for many US industries in addition to agriculture, such as construction, landscaping, building cleaning and maintenance, food prepar-

BY ELAINE LEVINE

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There is some evidence that by migrating and maintaining transnational ties, poor migrants with low skills—as is the case for most of the recent Mexican migrants to the United States—improve their social and economic status within their communities of origin.

ation, and meat and poultry processing, to mention just a few.

There is some evidence that by migrating and maintaining transnational ties, poor migrants with low skills—as is the case for most of the recent Mexican migrants to the United States—improve their social and economic status within their communities of origin. Their families are often better housed and better fed than those in which there are no migrant workers. After paying debts and covering basic survival needs, migrants send remittances and savings back home. These are usually used to construct or improve housing and general

living conditions. Providing more schooling for children remaining in Mexico is often a priority. After a time, small businesses may be established with such funds. This is to be expected since the quest for improved employment conditions and earnings is the driving force behind contemporary migratory flows to begin with.

There are, however, some negative aspects. Families may be separated for long periods, or even permanently. And although return migrants may achieve relative success in enhancing the socioeconomic status of their communities of origin, upon their resettlement in Mexico, they face few long-range economic prospects for continued socioeconomic mobility because of the generally depressed local economies characteristic of most sending regions. Furthermore, for those who do not return, the continuation of upward socioeconomic mobility once they have settled in the United States may be even more elusive.

SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY

Throughout most of the 20th century in the United States, the conventional wisdom was that low-skilled, newly arriving immigrants would logically occupy the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder, but given the opportunity, their children or grandchildren would likely be able to gain entrance to the “middle class.” However, over the past several years, some authors have begun to question this notion, given the persistent socioeconomic disadvantages experienced by certain groups of recent immigrants, particularly Mexicans and some other Latinos. Opinions are divided between those who maintain that over the course of a generation or so the descendants of today’s immigrant population will achieve levels of upward socioeconomic mobility similar to those attained by previous

immigrant populations and those who think that the road to upward mobility is considerably more difficult today, and therefore that the process will be much slower.

It may well be that the hardships experienced by immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century have been paled by time or that the light at the end of the tunnel simply seems farther off for many of today's newcomers because their journey has just begun. Nevertheless, the circumstances prevailing today make the upward climb very difficult for the descendants of low-skilled immigrants with limited schooling—which is the case for most currently arriving Mexican migrants, who happen to comprise the largest immigrant group in the United States today. The conditions in which these immigrants live and work and the conditions in which their children live and are schooled constitute serious obstacles to their upward socioeconomic mobility.

Many new socioeconomic groups appeared along with the seemingly endless supply of newcomers. Most can earn up to 10 or even 15 times more than in their countries of origin. Nevertheless, they are relegated to the lowest socioeconomic strata in the United States. Even though Latino workers make up a growing proportion of the labour force, they continue to experience high poverty rates, high unemployment rates, and low incomes. There has been a noticeable relative wage decline in almost all of the occupations that now have high concentrations of Latino workers. The drop is particularly noticeable in some of the specialized construction trades, where median weekly earnings were higher than the general median in 1990 but are now considerably lower. Thus, over the past 20 years, Latino workers have generally experienced a wage decline with respect to other population groups in the United States.

Among Latinos, those of Mexican origin tend to have the lowest incomes. Not only do Mexicans earn less because of lower educational attainment, they also tend to receive lower returns for all

[T]he road to upward mobility is considerably more difficult today.

levels of education. Undocumented workers are a particularly vulnerable group because of their irregular status. On occasion, employers themselves have reported them to authorities for deportation without pay after several weeks of work. Still, their numbers have increased markedly over the past few years. It is estimated that at least half of all Mexicans residing in the United States are undocumented, and the proportion among those who arrived after 2000 is thought to be about 85 percent.

A DYSFUNCTIONAL AND BROKEN SYSTEM

Obama's position on immigration reform stems from a recognition that the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States has risen tremendously since 2000, and that those who seek legal entry to the United States have to wait far too long for their applications to be processed. He has referred to the current immigration system as dysfunctional and broken. He favours increased border security and voted for additional fencing along the border. He advocates "cracking down on employers who hire undocumented immigrants." Furthermore, he believes that "[i]mmigration raids are ineffective . . . and have placed all the burdens of a broken system onto immigrant families." Thus far, Obama seems to be committed to supporting a system that would somehow allow "undocumented immigrants who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, and go to the back of the line for the opportunity to become citizens," which implicitly means they would not be deported or have to leave the country voluntarily. He has also advocated putting "greater emphasis on keeping immigrant families together."

However, given the current economic crisis, none of this is likely to happen early on in the Obama presidency. Interestingly enough, Obama has also stated the belief that the United States needs "to do more to promote economic development in Mexico" in order to decrease the flow of undocumented immigrants. This is another discussion that will have to be postponed until the US economy turns itself around. It would also be heartening if the Mexican government would seriously confront the fact that it too needs to do more to promote economic development in Mexico in order to stem the flow of undocumented emigrants to the United States. That might eventually provide a better basis for dealing with the de facto labour market integration that has already taken place between Mexico and the United States and which will no doubt continue in the future one way or another.

Those who migrate to the United States from Mexico, either temporarily or permanently, are usually seeking a better livelihood and a better life for their children. However, these children, whether they remain in Mexico or go to the United States with migrant parents, are sometimes the ones most short-changed by this process. If they remain in Mexico, they may suffer from the temporary (or sometimes permanent) loss of and separation from the absent parent, without really gaining a great deal in terms of better material circumstances and enhanced prospects for their own livelihood. If, on the other hand, they migrate to the United States, although they are better housed and better fed, they will nevertheless probably be relegated to the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. In either case, in either country, their aspirations and their dreams, their potential and their talents, will most likely remain largely unrealized, unless some very significant changes are made on both sides of the border.

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The troubled future of the auto industry in North America*

MEXICO'S AUTO INDUSTRY

The auto industry has been a key sector of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) since it came into effect in 1994. The industry is highly integrated throughout the region. The plants in Mexico have grown, become sophisticated, and, above all, become important platforms for exports, especially to the US market. Mexican auto exports were nearly US\$15 billion in 1994 and reached US\$50 billion in 2008, making up more than 20 percent of all the country's exports. In addition, this sector accounts for 6 percent of all the country's foreign investment. The entire sector creates a total of 1 million direct and indirect jobs, representing 7 percent of the country's workforce. One million automobiles are sold on the Mexican market every year, and, all together, the industry exports 1.4 million units. Mexico's automobile market has become very sophisticated: between domestically produced and imported cars, almost 400 different models are available.

The introduction of NAFTA resulted in the industry's internationalization because it forced companies like Nissan and Volkswagen to restructure their production strategies, mainly to limit the advantages the treaty gives the United States' Big Three automakers—GM, Chrysler, and Ford. For example, Nissan relocated production of some of its models to plants in Mexico and, together with Volkswagen, attracted auto parts suppliers in order to improve the quality of its vehicles. This enabled it to compete against US manufacturers in the Mexican market and at the same time export to external markets, mainly the United States.

Several recent trends have emerged. Exports to the United States have begun to decline. In 2001, almost 95 percent of all Mexican auto exports went to the United States, but today that figure has dropped to a little over 70 percent. US-

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Under NAFTA, Canada and Mexico remained very dependent on the policies of the Big Three in the United States, and today they pay a very high price for that dependency.

owned companies, especially Ford, GM, and Chrysler, traditionally have concentrated on exports to the US market, although recently they have begun exporting to Europe and Latin America also. Nissan's and Volkswagen's exports have diversified—for example, VW sends a considerable number of units to Europe, more in fact than it sends to the United States.

Another trend in the domestic market is Nissan's and VW's increasingly intense competition with US companies. This is a period of transition in which GM, Ford, and Chrysler are losing their hegemony in Mexico. Nissan will be the biggest seller of automobiles in the domestic market in 2009. The shape of the industry is changing for the better, particularly because the increase in gas prices in Mexico makes the use of Japanese cars

more attractive due to their higher fuel mileage.

THE BIG THREE CRISIS

How will the crisis of the Big Three automakers in the United States affect the automobile market in Mexico? The Big Three have ten plants in Mexico, which produce 54 percent of total national output. So, a crisis in these companies is a big crisis for the entire industry in Mexico because of their influence in many branches of the economy. However, the impression one gets when analyzing the situation of the Big Three in Mexico is that their performance has been better in the Mexican plants and the signs of declining competitiveness in the Mexican market are weaker than in the United States.

This can be shown with a few figures. For example, Ford and GM have committed investments to restructure their businesses in the Mexican market. This restructuring is focused on emphasizing their compact cars like the Ford Fiesta and those made by GM's Chevrolet brand. In addition, Mexican car production was the only one in all of North America that increased slightly from January to November 2008 (4.5 percent), while Canada and the United States experienced important drops in production (−19.3 percent and −18.7 percent, respectively). In addition, in US light vehicle sales, cars from Mexico experienced the smallest drop of any country of origin in the world (−1.7 percent). Production costs in Mexico will be a factor that will encourage continued investment. It is becoming clear that it will be very difficult for US companies to stay on their feet vis-à-vis their Asian and European competitors, and it is unlikely that they can survive in the long run.

The only way for US auto manufacturers to strengthen their position is to make profound changes. First, continental integration will have to be much deeper,

and Mexico could have an important position because of its cost advantages and the level of production it has achieved. Second, technology will have to improve, even in the segments of inexpensive compacts, to be able to compete in terms of efficiency. Finally, technology and quality policies will have to improve in distribution and administration to make both production processes and sales more efficient, thus reducing costs. North America faces a great challenge in the auto industry, and we will see how it meets it—it will either recover or disappear altogether.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The loss of the Big Three in Mexico could give rise to a new situation in which foreign investors—Asian or European—already operating in Mexico could fill the vacuum left by the United States. Mexico has signed trade agreements with practically the entire world, and this could also be an advantage for producing in Mexico. Mexican production has already begun to internationalize and depend less on the US market.


North American Vehicle Total Production, January to November 2008

	January 2008	November 2008	Change
United States	10,072,186	8,192,433	-18.7%
Canada	2,443,381	1,971,978	-19.3%
Mexico	1,963,316	2,051,231	4.5%

Source: *Ward's Automotive Reports: Key Automotive Data; North American Production Summary, November 2008.*

However, in the short run, a worsening of the Big Three's crisis could be catastrophic for the Mexican economy if it means plant closings. A collapse of any of these companies, like GM or Chrysler, would have very negative effects. The sector requires time to adapt to the new conditions and to search for and consolidate new markets. On the other hand, any restructuring centred on the US market and workforce would also have a severe impact. It is probable that in either case, Mexico's government would be forced to promote its own bailout package and put in place a more active policy to reconfigure the industry without the Big Three or with companies more limited in their market power.

Clearly, we are on the verge of great changes and unprecedented situations for North America.

It is important to remember that the auto industry, worldwide, has suffered from overcapacity. Sharp competition has forced many companies to merge in recent years and seek new ways to survive. Under NAFTA, Canada and Mexico remained very dependent on the policies of the Big Three in the United States, and today they pay a very high price for that dependency. 

* The information for this article comes mainly from the Mexican Auto Industry Association (AMIA) and from *Ward's Automotive Reports*.

Security certificates

continued from page 31

approved as a special advocate one needed to be granted top-secret national security clearance and be experienced in immigration law matters, criminal law matters, national security law matters, or a combination of all three. Twenty-six people were approved by the government as special advocates. The security certificate legislation requires the judge in the case to appoint as special advocate the lawyer chosen by the person concerned, unless there is a conflict of interest that prevents that lawyer from acting as a special advocate.

It was the view of the special advocates that two special advocates should be chosen for each case, and the government and the court agreed with that view. There are now a total of seven lawyers acting as special advocates in the five cases. Three of the special advocates are each doing two cases; the other four

special advocates are just dealing with one case.

I am a special advocate in the *Harkat* and in the *Almrei* cases. Because of the non-communication provisions set out in the security certificate legislation, without the consent of the judge in those cases I am unable to comment on how those cases are proceeding and whether the special advocate process set out in the legislation will ultimately be found to meet the fundamental justice requirements under s. 7 of the Charter.

FIVE FEDERAL COURT JUDGES WILL DECIDE THE FATE OF THE SECURITY CERTIFICATE MEN

It is expected that over the course of 2009 the five Federal Court judges dealing with these cases will reach their decisions on whether the security certificates filed in these cases are reason-

able. Their decisions will likely include rulings on whether the new security certificate procedures, with the use of special advocates, comply with the requirements of fundamental justice under s. 7 of the Charter.

And then the appeals will start. 

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Migrants in temporary worker programs: North America's second-class citizens

EXAMINING MIGRANT WORKER PROGRAMS

The United States and Canada both use temporary migrant worker programs (TMWPs) as part of their labour market and foreign policy strategy. Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which includes the bilateral Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) that brings over 11,000 Mexicans a year to Canada, is often held up as a model program. If temporary worker programs are going to be on the policy agenda, it is worth examining them closely.

Canada has dramatically stepped up the use of TMWPs. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 2007 edition of *Facts and Figures*, in 2007, 165,198 temporary workers entered the country. Adding this to the 137,105 temporary workers already in Canada brought the total to 302,303 temporary workers present in Canada that year. Figure 1 illustrates the consistently high number of and share represented by foreign workers among temporary residents in Canada, as well as the sharp recent increase in this entrance category, which is roughly equivalent to the US "visa worker" category. Canada is not unique in this increasing reliance on temporary migrant workers (TMWs).

Supporters argue that (1) TMWPs give countries like Canada a way to manage labour demands in critical sectors while overcoming the limitations of an immigration system that favours highly educated applicants but creates shortages of "low-skilled" workers; (2) that temporary workers benefit migrant-sending countries through remittances and skills transfer; and (3) TMWPs offer a safe and legal alternative to undocumented migration.

Critics, however, argue that temporary worker programs create a vulnerable class of workers with few opportunities

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Critics, however, argue that temporary worker programs create a vulnerable class of workers with few opportunities for skills transfer, and may do more to encourage dependency rather than sustainable development.

for skills transfer, and may do more to encourage dependency rather than sustainable development. Although temporary workers in Canada are more secure compared with undocumented migrants in the United States, they are still vulnerable. The critics are right and empirical research confirms the vulnerability experienced by the workers.

PRECARIZACIÓN OF WORK

TMWPs must be understood in the context of policies aimed at managing cross-border migration and broader trends associated with globalization that contribute to the precarization of work (*precarización* in Spanish works best). Such trends include the deregulation of employment standards, eroding social protection for workers and their families, declining unionization, and the shift away from the mythical "norm" of the standard employment relationship—which are all occurring on a global scale.

Temporary contracts, part-time work, unpredictable schedules, and limited benefits are becoming the new norm for highly paid consultants as well as lower paid temp workers. These features of employment apply to jobs in competitive sectors where jobs can be shipped overseas (for example, call centres), as well as to non-competitive, mainly low-wage occupations where jobs must be situated locally (for example, caregiving jobs). Temporary migrant workers are found in locations and sectors with labour shortages, such as nursing. They are also used to fill jobs that native-born workers do not want to take at prevailing wage levels or working conditions. Moreover, "low-skill" TMWPs channel workers into highly racialized occupations with growing concentrations of visible minority workers.

One noteworthy trend evident across countries that import temporary workers is the proliferation of TMWPs tailored to the needs of employers in specific sectors/occupations. The Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker Program now enables employers to bring workers into a widening range of occupations such as bait worm collector, tree planter, forklift operator, computer programmer, oil sands driller, cleaner, childcare worker, and eldercare worker. There is great variation in the regulations and arrangements surrounding the pro-

grams. Programs that recruit high-skill workers often allow family members to join workers and offer workers a path to permanent residence, options denied to those filling low-skill occupations.

Whether by design or accident, rising temporary migration is increasing the number of vulnerable workers, particularly in less regulated occupations. In addition, TMWPs are contributing to the number of people with irregular or precarious migratory status in Canada. The rise of these programs may further erode labour protections and social safety nets already experiencing strain, something of concern to *all* workers regardless of citizenship and migratory status.

INCREASING VULNERABILITY

The federal government claims that temporary migrant workers are covered under the same federal and provincial labour standards as Canadian workers. In practice, however, temporary migrants cannot exercise their rights in the same ways as citizens for various reasons, including: language barriers, lack of information, geographic and social isolation, lack of transportation, fear of employer reprisal, and dependence on their employer for both permission to remain in Canada and future employment. This leaves temporary workers highly vulnerable to abuses in the labour market and at the hands of unscrupulous immigration consultants. Numerous media reports link unregulated third-party recruiters to corruption, exploitation, and fraud, including “selling” work permits abroad, charging exorbitant fees to migrants or employers, and providing misinformation regarding the proposed type of work, potential wages, or immigration status.

This regulatory lapse is exacerbated within the already weak governance structure of TMWPs in Canada. TMWPs are part of Canada’s federal immigration policy, yet they are managed jointly by two federal departments and are governed by provincial statutes with regard to employment standards, labour, and health. When problems are brought to the attention of federal officials, respon-

As long as temporary migrant workers remain legally unequal to other workers and have few if any pathways to permanent residence, it is unlikely that their situation will improve.

sibility is often deferred back to provincial and municipal levels of government as a form of buck passing. Much abuse of migrant workers goes unchecked because of the lack of federal accountability and regulation. At the federal level there is no protective legislation aimed at temporary migrant workers. Provincially, only Manitoba (which only employs a fraction of Canada’s TMWs) has legislation pertaining to temporary migrant workers, leaving most migrant workers in the country outside of these protections. The Canadian government is not alone in shirking responsibility for migrant rights. Sending-country governments are also complicit.

HEIGHTENED HEALTH RISKS

Temporary migrant workers are vulnerable to heightened health risks. The Low-Skill Pilot Project (LSPP) and the SAWP channel temporary migrant workers into sectors with notably high injury rates. TMWs employed in agriculture are particularly vulnerable to health risks for several reasons: they work during months associated with high rates of disease transmission; engage in unprotected and untrained use of pesticides, fertilizers, and farm equipment; and face significant communication barriers.

Poor, unregulated, and crowded housing further increases risks of com-

municable disease transmission (for example, tuberculosis). In the SAWP (where housing is provided by the employer) there are no guidelines with respect to housing capacities, proximity to pesticides, access to clean drinking water, proper ventilation, etc., and workers are not typically covered by provincial landlord and tenant law.

Low-skill temporary migrants across all sectors are vulnerable to health risks because of limited access to health-care services and insurance. With the LSPP there is a three-month probationary period, during which TMWs have no access to Canadian public health care. During these months, employers are to provide private health insurance to workers; however, migrants often lack information regarding the coverage or how to use it.

Many walk-in clinics, particularly in rural or remote areas, refuse to recognize private insurance. Private insurance policies require migrants to pay up front for any medical visits or treatments, after which they can claim reimbursement. As a result, most migrants postpone medical visits or treatment. If TMWs are injured while working, they are dependent on employers to provide access to health coverage and Workers Compensation Board claims. Because there are no exit health-screening procedures and no followup health examinations upon return to countries of origin, illnesses and injuries often go untreated.

Temporary worker programs are increasingly popular across Europe and North America, and in numerous sending countries. As the new US administration and other governments consider immigration policy, it is critical they not forget temporary migrant worker programs. Although these programs offer employers control and flexibility and workers an improvement over unauthorized border crossing, from the perspective of employment standards, and the rights and health of workers, they erode security and increase vulnerability. As long as temporary migrant workers remain legally unequal to other workers

Canadian advice for President Obama on US–China relations

Dear Mr. President,

As crowded as your inbox is with urgent domestic and foreign policy priorities, I write to draw your attention to the top long-term challenge. Your approach to the content and conduct of America's relationship with China will have global consequences stretching far into the future.

Your strategy should be to treat China as a partner in leading the global economy. The groundwork for such a partnership has been laid by the previous administration through the Strategic Economic Dialogue. This dialogue has taken place at the level of senior officials. You should raise the dialogue to your own level. A one-on-one meeting with President Hu Jintao should take place early in your term. This should be the first of what would become regular bilateral leaders' summits for discussing bilateral and global interests.

US–CHINA COOPERATION

Two items should top the agenda. The first item should be US–China cooperation, as there is much the two countries can do together. China has many domestic challenges. Rebalancing the economy will take time and resources, particularly to introduce clean and energy-efficient technologies. Joint research is needed to develop the new technologies. Nowhere do the long-term interests of both countries coincide more closely than around protecting the environment. Together the two countries hold the key to an international regime on climate change. Chinese officials have made it clear that they accept some global responsibility: if the United States commits to climate-change goals and programs, they say, "China will meet it almost half way."

BY WENDY DOBSON

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China's rapid emergence to pre-eminence on the global stage requires deeper engagement by the American administration.

Most Americans still think of China as a poor rural country run by an autocratic regime. Some see it as a threat. You, however, are aware that China's economy is now one of the world's largest, regardless of the measure used, because of its stunningly successful growth strategies over the past 30 years. China's urban coastal cities are now more modern than many of America's major cities. China is not a monolith. It is a decentralized country with local administrations that frequently disregard central directives. Size and diversity allow experiments with governance and production. From experiments come choices for addressing the legacies of central planning and grasping the opportunities of the future. Intense internal debates are going on about China's political and economic futures, and about its role in the world.

The complexities of China's domestic challenges should not be underestimated. As many as 15 million employees, most of them migrant workers, are

expected to lose their jobs in the next few months. Most of them will be sent home, and many will not have been paid at least since the October holiday. There will be many disgruntled citizens, caught up in a growth recession (caused by the policy mistakes of others, not by the Chinese) in a country that has known only rapid growth for more than a generation.

MANAGING THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

The second agenda item is partnership with China in managing the global economy. China's rapid emergence to pre-eminence on the global stage requires deeper engagement by the American administration. Other major countries like Russia, Brazil, and India are also emerging, but none has yet managed its transformation as successfully as China. The United States' post-September 11, 2001 preoccupations with fighting terrorism and its foreign policy in the Middle East have shifted US attention away from historical alliances like those in Asia and from multilateral institutions. You are committed to changing this strategy. In bringing about change, you have the opportunity to treat China as an equal partner and stakeholder in the global economy.

It is in both countries' interests to see China take on more global responsibilities, and the Chinese leadership recognizes this. A week before the G20 leaders' meeting in November 2008, the Chinese government announced a huge fiscal stimulus package followed a few weeks later by measures to encourage more lending by Chinese banks. As Premier Wen Jiabao has said, stimulating the Chinese economy will be good for China and good for the world.

China has been a model citizen in the multilateral institutions for trade and

finance including the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization, but it has largely stayed on the sidelines. This stance has been consistent with China's interests: a peaceful and stable international system allows its leaders to focus on their domestic challenges. Domestic priorities of job creation and rapid growth have been served well by macroeconomic policies that promote growth and stability, including monetary and financial policies that stabilize exchange and interest rates. At the same time, this policy stance exacerbates international imbalances as measured by China's nearly \$2 trillion war chest of foreign exchange reserves. The leadership recognizes that growth driven by investment based on the cheap capital generated by its monetary and financial policies is unsustainable. Capital and other input prices are subsidized and overused, generating regional and rural-urban income inequality and dangerous levels of pollution and emissions. The leadership also recognizes that the other side of the problem is inadequate US savings.

OVERHAULING INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

So far the imbalances are being dealt with through bilateral consultations. The International Monetary Fund has not been a player, in part because of mistrust built up during the Asian financial crisis a decade ago and in part because of its outmoded governance structure. China's clout in the institution is not commensurate with its economic significance. Similarly, the G8 lacks legitimacy because it is increasingly unrepresentative. The "8 plus 5" model for including China, India, and others in part of the meetings has outlived its purpose. The G20 is inclusive but probably too large to work effectively.

Overhauling the international institutions should be a hallmark of your presidency. You could signal in 2009 that the stand-alone G8 meetings should end with the current cycle (in Canada in 2010) and be replaced by a more repre-

sentative forum. Making the G20 a permanent leaders' meeting rather than a crisis management mechanism is one option. Creating a G14 (the least disruptive option but unrealistic in that smaller economies continue as members) is another option; a revamped G8 in which membership reflects economic significance measured at market exchange rates is another. This option would be disruptive. Yet if you delay such changes you could see China turn to an Asian regional group.

Overhauling the WTO is another priority. It will require very careful consideration. As a new WTO member, China has not been an active participant in the Doha Round of trade talks, arguing that it had already made many unilateral concessions in order to gain membership. Along with India, the EU, and the United States, it became an accessory to the breakdown of the Doha Round in July 2008, over disagreements about concessions in agriculture. Your election promises to evaluate trade in the interests of American workers could come back to haunt you if China does the same

as it copes with the disappearance of jobs in its export industries.

Handling this increasingly important relationship will take considerable patience and effort. Your commitment to pragmatic and respectful relationships with foreign powers will be a big plus. Realize too that if things go wrong in China, the consequences will spill over into the international system. You will also have to deal with American fears and concerns. China will not be a multi-party democracy any time soon, but already there is greater intra-party democracy and efforts to engage civil society groups in a controlled way, as well as experiments with political reforms in certain parts of the country.

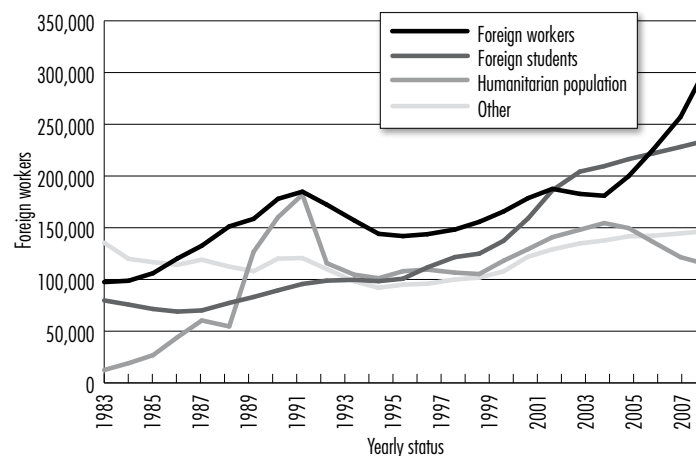
China's leaders and people will respond well to your habit of treating people and governments with respect. The stage is already set for rising bilateral disputes and conflicts because of the growing bilateral interdependence and the external imbalances that have built up in the past decade. But the chances of managing them increase when both countries behave as equals. ❀

Migrants continued from page 37

and have few if any pathways to permanent residence, it is unlikely that their situation will improve. As policy debates continue, analysts will look for "best practices," of which the Canadian model is constantly touted as an exemplar. Rather than accepting this assessment uncritically and continuing to operate

under the assumption that less regulation or deregulation is good, it is important to examine Canadian TMWPs and other visa programs critically, to identify and implement policies and regulations that reduce vulnerability and increase health and security for all. ❀

FIGURE 1 Canada—Temporary Residents by Yearly Status, 1983 to 2007



Source: Canada—Temporary residents by yearly status, 1983 to 2007. Facts and Figures 2007. Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2007/temporary/01.asp>.

Bush's imperial presidency is Obama's toughest challenge

Barack Obama campaigned for the presidency on a theme of change, and critics of the Bush administration are hoping for nothing less than a paradigm shift in American government. On George Bush's watch, the United States government tortured prisoners, blocked their access to the courts, defied the separation of powers by sidestepping Congress and attempting to circumscribe the role of the judiciary, illegally spied on American citizens, and generally claimed an inherent executive power equal to that of absolute monarchs. Obama's criticism of this shameful record and his nomination of high-profile critics of the Bush administration's policies to important posts in the Justice Department are hopeful signs that change really is coming to Washington.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE "UNITARY EXECUTIVE" AND THE EXPANSION OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER

In December 2005, the United States House of Representatives passed a special amendment to a routine appropriations bill. The amendment, sponsored by Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona, barred cruel, degrading, and inhumane treatment of prisoners held by the United States at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba and elsewhere. President Bush had opposed the McCain amendment but acceded to its inclusion when it became clear that the measure had overwhelming congressional support.

Nonetheless, in his signing statement Bush announced that "[t]he executive branch shall construe [the amendment relating to detainees] in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President to supervise the unitary executive branch and as Commander in Chief and consistent with the constitutional limitations on the judicial power . . .

BY STEPHEN L. NEWMAN

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Similarly worded signing statements were attached to more than 800 laws over the course of the Bush presidency, quietly asserting an unheard of constitutional authority and vastly magnifying the power of the executive branch.

of protecting the American people from further terrorist attacks."

Similarly worded signing statements were attached to more than 800 laws over the course of the Bush presidency, quietly asserting an unheard of constitutional authority and vastly magnifying the power of the executive branch. Although previous presidents had issued signing statements addressing their concerns that elements of legislation being signed into law encroached on executive privilege, none went so far as to claim an inherent constitutional authority to ignore provisions of laws with which they disagreed.

The doctrine of a unitary executive supposedly derives from *The Federalist Papers*, where Alexander Hamilton praised the "unity" of the American presidency. But what Hamilton had in mind was the advantage he saw in having one person as head of the executive branch rather than a plural presidency consisting of two or more persons who would function as a committee, which had been rejected by the Founding Fathers.

Initially formulated by President Ronald Reagan's Office of Legal Counsel in the 1980s (which included on its staff future Supreme Court justice Samuel Alito) and subsequently burnished by Bush, Cheney, and company, the doctrine of the unitary executive holds first that presidential authority over the executive branch is absolute and that presidents are not bound by laws or treaties that in their view place limits on that authority.

Second, the doctrine claims that the other branches of government may not interfere with the president's actions arising under his executive authority. In addition, Bush administration lawyers have repeatedly argued that the courts may not adjudicate in areas that the president deems to be within his executive power. Consider, for example, the administration's strained denial of habeas corpus to both foreign nationals and United States citizens declared to be "enemy combatants" in the war on terror.

ALL POWER TO THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

While the doctrine of a unitary executive appears to have been created out of whole cloth, the Commander in Chief clause provides more fertile ground for claims of executive power. The United States Constitution makes the president commander-in-chief of the army and

navy “when called into the actual Service of the United States.” Most constitutional scholars agree, however, that the sparsely worded Commander in Chief clause does not make the president the end point in the military chain of command. That honour goes to Congress, which is vested not only with the power to declare war but also with the responsibility for regulating the military, punishing crimes committed on the high seas, and settling “offenses against the law of nations.”

Up until the wars of the 20th century, Congress was foremost in the conduct of the nation’s military affairs and foreign policy, though not without the occasional protest from presidents who would have preferred greater autonomy. The emergence of the United States as a world power in the last century enhanced the role of the executive in foreign affairs. Increasingly, presidents claimed a greater constitutional authority with regard to military matters, claims that were by and large ceded by Congress and endorsed by the courts.

The curious feature of the Bush administration’s reading of the Commander in Chief clause is its insistence that an “originalist” reading of the Constitution—that is, a reading faithful to the intentions of the Founding Fathers—reveals presidents to have vast military powers far in excess of those actually exercised in the past.

The Bush Commander in Chief doctrine was first articulated by then deputy assistant attorney general John Yoo in 2001. Yoo claimed that the other branches of government may impose no limits whatsoever on actions taken by the president as commander-in-chief in defence of the nation. This utterly groundless claim, repeated countless times in subsequent memoranda and legal briefs, was used to justify imprisoning “enemy combatants” indefinitely and to deny them the protections of the Geneva Conventions. It subjected detainees to torture in violation of the laws of the United States and international law and executed warrantless surveillance of domestic telephone calls contrary to existing American law.

It is to be hoped that Obama, as a former professor of constitutional law, will respect the people’s civil liberties and the legitimate role played by Congress and the courts in America’s system of checks and balances.

THE WAR PRESIDENCY AND EXECUTIVE AGGRANDIZEMENT

In a recent issue of *Vanity Fair* the Bush administration’s Jack Goldsmith, one-time legal adviser at the Department of Defense and later head of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, tries to put the administration’s conduct in perspective. He observes that in times of war and crisis past presidents also claimed extraordinary powers. Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy “stretched the law and bent the law, and many people think they broke the law.” The views on executive power espoused by Vice-President Cheney and his aide David Addington seem to Goldsmith “not unlike some of the most extreme assertions of Lincoln and Roosevelt.” But he notes that unlike Cheney and Addington, Lincoln and Roosevelt recognized the need to seek congressional approval, if only after the fact, and to respect what he calls the “soft values” of constitutionalism. A second difference that distinguishes Cheney and Addington, according to Goldsmith, is that “it was almost as if they were interested in expanding executive power for its own sake.”

Goldsmith gets it almost right: expanding executive power for its own sake was the whole point.

REINING IN THE EXECUTIVE

In a series of important cases concerning the power of the president to deny enemy combatants access to the courts, *Rasul v. Bush* and *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* (both from 2004), *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006), and most recently *Boumediene v. Bush* (2007), the Supreme Court dealt

the Bush administration a serious reversal, showing that despite its increasingly conservative cast, the judicial branch is not prepared to indulge the executive’s every constitutional whim.

By and large, however, despite some grumbling by Democrats and the odd Republican, Congress shamefully acquiesced in Bush’s power grab by giving retroactive legislative cover to some of his actions and by failing to shine a bright light on the misconduct of executive branch officers or hold them accountable. It is arguable that high officials of the Bush administration responsible for “extraordinary renditions” and the torture of detainees in the war on terror are guilty of war crimes, but the critics generally concede that none of them will ever be formally charged, much less brought to trial.

President Obama has announced that he will close the prison at Guantanamo and it is widely expected that he will end the constitutionally dubious military commissions set up by President Bush to try detainees. Moreover, his picks for the Justice Department, notably Eric Holder as Attorney General, Elena Kagan (dean of Harvard Law School) as Solicitor General, and Dawn Johnsen (professor of law at Indiana University) as head of the Office of Legal Counsel, signal a clear repudiation of the Bush power grab. Johnsen, it deserves to be noted, published a scathing critique of recent counterterrorism initiatives in a law review article last year titled “What’s a President to Do? Interpreting the Constitution in the Wake of Bush Administration Abuses.”

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Mr. O: The first urban-American president?

When in 1973 President Richard Nixon declared the urban crisis in America over, it clearly wasn't. What had run out was the patience of a Republican administration hell-bent on eradicating not poverty but the War on Poverty, a war that had been associated with the Democratic administration of Lyndon B. Johnson but had its immediate origins in the Kennedy years, and its longer roots in 1930s Keynesian demand-side stimulation programs. Future Republican administrations, most prominently the administration of Ronald Reagan, used their loathing for inner cities, their "problems," and their populations as an ideological wedge issue to protect "tax-payers" from undue obligations.

The view of city as dumping ground, of course, was unmistakably racialized, if not racist. Linking "urban" to colour and poverty has a long genealogy in American history. A decade earlier it had been called "the Negro problem." In a post-1980s persistence of this, the public engaged in a corrosive debate on the urban underclass (read African-American, but also increasingly Latino, underclass), from which a litany of social ills—single motherhood and violent crime in particular—supposedly sprang. The systematic neglect of cities, not surprisingly, has exacerbated the intensity and magnitude of segregation and ghettoization in these places since 1980.

OBAMA: WHAT TO DO?

Obama is now committed to assisting US cities, a major change from the recent past. Most directly, the new president has declared the necessity of establishing a White House Office of Urban Policy. Its centrepiece is to be a massive physical infrastructure package designed to shore up eroding roads, sewer lines, bridges, and housing. A key part of this will be the creation of a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank to enhance federal transportation investments. Obama also proposes a national urban network of

BY ROGER KEIL AND DAVID WILSON

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Rescuing cities from the massive erasure of previous presidential administrations, Obama frequently speaks of them as forgotten and neglected places on the national scene.

public-private business incubators, enhanced workforce training, the support and establishment of business "innovation clusters," and the strengthening of Small Business Administration programs. Obama identifies via these initiatives three pieces in the urban revitalization puzzle: jobs, businesses, and city infrastructure.

Moreover, this self-proclaimed former community rabble-rouser in South Chicago routinely speaks of cities and their reality of fiscal struggle and declining living conditions. Rescuing cities from the massive erasure of previous presidential administrations, Obama frequently speaks of them as forgotten and neglected places on the national scene. Finally, his selection of New York City housing Commissioner Shaun Donovan, a youthful and hyperenergetic policy wonk, to head the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) signals an activist urban agenda. Unlike previous HUD secretaries, Donovan has a vast know-

ledge of housing issues going into the job, having spearheaded New York's Department of Housing Preservation and Development to build and preserve 165,000 units of affordable housing.

But difficult questions persist. Cities for whom? Who is to be helped in the drive to revitalize these cities? And what does an urban upgrade precisely mean? For all their fanfare, his array of programs still fail to specify the classes, populations, or groups that will be privileged to live, flourish, and propel politics in the new renewed US city.

At the core of Obama's dilemma is that cities are profoundly ambiguous in the public imagining. They are paradoxically seen as places of virile capitalist might but also of culturally dubious coloured and poor populations (blacks and Latinos now make up 55 percent of the population in America's largest cities). Across the political spectrum, cities are still conceived as bold instruments of economic power and entrepreneurial acumen. But, to many, these places are also imagined as scarred by economically failed, failing, and insufficiently contributive populations.

A NEW STRATEGY OF URBAN RENEWAL

A strategy of political expediency would dictate a series of overtures to restore a more just, egalitarian city amid a full-fledged effort to upgrade the opportunities for and vibrancy of real-estate and industrial capital. There is continued commitment to the established policy tools of past conservative (Bush I, Bush II, Reagan, Nixon) administrations—block grants, public-private partnerships, enterprise zones, incubator districts. As Obama speaks of a new vision and future for cities, he offers us a new sensitivity to the plight of cities, but struggles to fashion a distinctively new way to see and help them.

Perhaps following the rhetoric and ideals of Richard Florida's highly resonant creative class paradigm would be

the expedient rhetorical cover to pursue a new strategy. Florida's privileging of middle-class and upper-middle-class people and institutions as the engine of city solvency and growth has widespread support in the planning, policy, and government realms. Obama, who in the words of columnist Josh Leon represents "modernity and tolerance"—important markers in Florida's world—may well follow this strategy. The new "creative" middle classes have emerged as decisive voters in current American society as they swell in numbers and increasingly occupy the public and political spaces that matter. They do so, in particular, in the newly gentrified central cities.

The alternative is to focus on the core issues that plague the majority population (disproportionately racialized poor people) in these cities: scant decent-paying jobs, underfunded public schools, a dwindling ability to secure affordable housing, and racism and exploitation in the new low-wage service and day labour economies. In the Bush years, as programs and policies aided the goals and ideals of the real estate and business communities, this majority population suffered.

Yet, many mayors across America, still aligned with real-estate capital and growth machines as city revenues continue to plunge, now also aggressively call for help in alleviating deepening poverty, hunger, and hopelessness. But the incentive to pursue this strategy may not be sufficient. The disincentives are profound. The pendulum is now swinging back to inner city politics but perversely to the new liberal elites of the gentrified inner cities (Neil Smith's inner city "revanchists") at the expense of the poor who have been or are being displaced through catastrophic events like Hurricane Katrina and the subprime mortgage crisis, and through gentrification.

DOING THE RIGHT THING: THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Are there alternative forces that seek to put Obama on the other path? At the expense of singling out one over possibly

Whatever Obama decides to do, it is unclear at this moment whether he will marginalize the people of inner city America who danced in the streets on the night of his election.

hundreds of similar critical initiatives that have recently shaped the US urban scene, let's mention the Right to the City Alliance of longstanding radical urban community and labour groups, which have now created a nationwide coalition to coordinate urban struggles for progressive policies. These are critical core constituencies of Obama's urban popular support. They claim: "The hollowing out of the cities, the destruction of public participation, privatization, job loss, structural racism, and the loss of the very soul of the city has affected many sectors and constituencies. The Right to the City isn't a set of policies for one or another group of people: it is a fundamental approach to reorganizing our cities, to the leadership of the city, and to the future of the city."

Infrastructure investment is key to Obama's urban policy program. Yet, as David Harvey reminded us recently, such economic stimulus can be treacherous. Although it is likely that the disaster capitalists of Halliburton and company, who filled their coffers under Bush and Cheney with massive civic and military infrastructure investments at home and abroad, will lose their spot in the sun, Obama still has basically two options: Will he tread in the footsteps of Baron Haussmann, who rebuilt 19th-century

Paris, and New York technocrat Robert Moses and build roads for a "splintered city"? Or will his infrastructure package create transit lines leading toward a more democratic and redistributive metropolis?

A VISION IN THE MAKING?

Whatever Obama decides to do, it is unclear at this moment whether he will marginalize the people of inner-city America who danced in the streets on the night of his election. Obama here faces a choice of political expediency versus apparently heartfelt personal conviction, a decision that he believes will affect his political standing, base of support, pool of capital donations, and political legacy. On "the city question," then, Obama's choice of planning and policy tools to revitalize cities suggests a preliminary commitment to bolstering the needs and desires of real-estate, finance, and business capital as the key. But, it is not too late to modify this: decades of festering unemployment, underemployment, class and race segregation, and hopelessness among many deepen and need to be directly addressed. In this time of political change in America, with Republican politics discredited, the time to strike has never been better. ❁

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It is to be hoped that Obama, as a former professor of constitutional law, will respect the people's civil liberties and the legitimate role played by Congress and the courts in America's system of checks and balances. In the days preceding his inauguration all the portents are favourable. But it remains to be seen whether the ugly precedents set by

the Bush administration will be extinguished or simply allowed to lay dormant, possibly to be revived in the event of another 9/11. ❁

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Overhauling Homeland Security

BY LEONARDO CURZIO

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Obama's arrival at the White House means a qualitative change in the security paradigm of the previous Bush administration. On the international plane, the new secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, has already established that the unilateralism that narrowed the hegemonic power's possibilities for having more friends and allies internationally is on the way out. On the domestic security front, the first policy lines drawn by the new secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, also imply a change vis-à-vis the previous paradigm. Clearly, the new administration cannot change the existing strategic context. Nor can it ensure that the actors with the capability and will to injure US interests will disappear simply because a charismatic, popular president has taken office.

The United States needs to maintain the concerted effort of all its security agencies at all levels of government to prevent a terrorist attack on its territory and guarantee that terrorist cells are not harboured or bred within its borders. The impact of September 11, 2001 will not disappear just because the Democrats are now in the White House and have a comfortable majority in Congress.

SECURITY MYOPIA

However, the threat of terrorism is not the only security issue that the United States faces. The experience of the Bush administration provides an important lesson for those who will occupy top security posts, and that is that exclusively concentrating on only one security issue can have the undesired result of allowing other lesser threats or vulnerabilities to grow because no systematic measures are taken to contain them.

The security agenda does not end with the fight against terrorism, although that fight may be emblematic. Domestic security agencies in a country as powerful as the United States must take into account the existence of other threats—

A new paradigm will have to emerge, one that preserves the right of Americans to purchase and own weapons but also guarantees that those weapons will not be used to arm criminal organizations that threaten their neighbours and cause death and desolation along the border itself.

some with enormous destructive potential—such as natural disasters. Hurricane Katrina and its devastating effects in the state of Louisiana changed the security paradigm of the United States: it made it more receptive to the fact that the existence of one huge threat does not imply the disappearance of others. The country has begun to see how its vulnerability does not depend solely on the deliberate action of extremist groups with the express will to do it harm. The security paradigm is evolving, then, toward a full understanding of what a natural disaster can cause. The same is true of other threats such as human or animal epi-

demics, which can become very delicate issues if they reach a certain size. Biosecurity, as a concept, must be made more visible as a national concern, as must greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on global warming; both must become genuine national concerns on the global risks agenda.

In recent years, one of the fundamental domestic security strategy points was securing land and sea borders. The priority placed on the fight against terrorism had a devastating effect on US relations with its neighbours. Holdups in trade and slow functioning of borders and customs were the dominant concern in the years immediately following the 2001 terrorist attacks. However, the level of integration of the NAFTA economies has forced the governments to harmonize their security concerns (including the need to strictly control goods and individuals) with the functioning of an open economy and the dynamism of a border with millions of legitimate daily crossings. The domestic security agenda has had to fit in with the economic priorities of the region, and, through technology and the use of more reliable procedures, facilitate the movement of goods and persons.

A NEW APPROACH TO BORDER AND IMMIGRATION ISSUES

One of the most damaging effects of 9/11 for US labour markets and Mexican interests was the conscious, deliberate, and systematic criminalization of illegal immigrants. In many US political and media circles, illegal workers were cavalierly equated with potential terrorists. The argument repeated in the media and even in Congress was that if the border and immigration system was so porous as to allow six million illegal workers, the majority Mexican, to reside in the United States, who could guarantee that an al-Qaeda cell could not slip in with them? Despite the fact that in all these years, no one has been able to prove that any

illegal workers were terrorists, the anti-Mexican propaganda has shaped the public's perceptions.

Secretary Napolitano was governor of Arizona and is very well versed in migration and border issues. In one of her first statements during her confirmation hearings, she emphasized the need to change the paradigm criminalizing illegal workers as a matter of national security and to advance an agenda that promotes the rule of law and in which US employers who hire illegal workers are punished. In this way, Napolitano managed to conceptually and practically de-escalate a national security conflict and turn it into a matter of labour and immigration law, which, it should be noted, is a significant step forward.

THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUG AND ARMS TRAFFICKING

Another issue put on the back burner for many years because of the emphasis on the war on terror was the fight against drugs. The same could be said about arms trafficking. These two phenomena together have had a devastating effect on the stability of Mexico. The combined effect of maintaining extremely high levels of consumption in the United States and its widespread permissiveness regarding legal and illegal weapons sales has meant that the Mexico-US border has become highly explosive territory. It is true that there are no terrorists, but well-funded and heavily armed criminal organizations have scandalously increased their capability to challenge and corrupt the Mexican state. The criminals' firepower today is reflected in the more than 5,000 deaths they caused in 2008. It is widely documented that most of the weapons in the hands of these criminal organizations operating in Mexico have come from the United States. According to estimates of the Chamber of Deputies Justice Commission, in 2008, 668,000 firearms entered Mexico through our common border.

Clearly, the new US administration's conception of security will have to include this issue as a regional vulnerability whose main effects are felt in

US domestic security must also evolve toward harmonizing its security interests and priorities with international law and the global justice principles that the international system aspires to.


Mexico but also affects the United States. A new paradigm will have to emerge, one that preserves the right of Americans to purchase and own weapons but also guarantees that those weapons will not be used to arm criminal organizations that threaten their neighbours and cause death and desolation along the border itself.

It is equally important that the US administration recognize that the high rates of drug use within its borders are sustaining the criminal organizations in Mexico by providing them with enormous sums of money (as much as US\$17 billion a year according to government sources) to corrupt officials and boost their strength daily. The administration must turn that recognition into a systematic effort based on co-responsibility. The trend established in the so-called Merida Initiative, which situates the fight against drugs in the sphere of co-responsibility, is a methodological and political step forward in this regard. In the long run, it will bear fruit for Mexico's—and therefore the United States'—stability and security.

A SPHERE OF SHARED INTERESTS

As a result, the domestic security of the United States must evolve from a clearly sovereignty-based vision, in which one state affirms its power and puts its security priorities before those of other coun-

tries—and regardless of those other countries—to a vision in which shared responsibility is not only a matter of good political will, but also a matter of creating a genuine sphere of shared interests with its neighbours and allies. US domestic security must also evolve toward harmonizing its security interests and priorities with international law and the global justice principles that the international system aspires to. The last article that Bush administration Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff published in the influential magazine *Foreign Affairs* (2009) about the tension between US security priorities and international law must be the last will and testament of a security paradigm that is becoming a threat to the international system.

The United States is the most important country in the world. Consequently, it must assume the role of leader of the international system, not that of a country that becomes an obstacle to the aspirations of humanity in the spheres of justice or the environment. US security priorities must be compatible with the fundamental human values expressed in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is in large part an extension of the Declaration of Independence written by Thomas Jefferson. Because the founding values of the United States are the values of modernity, a republic based on obeying the law cannot maintain that the violation of human rights, inside or outside its borders, is defensible without falling into a grave philosophical contradiction, a contradiction that not only is a moral problem, but that has direct effects on the erosion of the United States' historical legitimacy. As a result, the United States' domestic security priorities must be compatible with the fundamental values of the republic and the international system that in large part it helped build. 

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Inside the security perimeter after 9/11

A SENSIBLE IDEA

It seems like a perfectly sensible idea. Both Canada and the United States benefit from an open border between them, but American security concerns need to be addressed in order to keep that border open. Creating a common security perimeter means meeting security threats at the edge of the common North American space, rather than at the borders between the continent's countries.

A common security perimeter is not only a sensible idea, it is quite an old one. Canada has long lived with a security perimeter shared with the United States, through its participation in NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command). NORAD provided a defensive perimeter that was shared by Canada and the United States and jointly defended against the threat of Soviet bomber and missile attack. By September 2001, it appeared that NORAD had outlived its usefulness, as there were no Soviets, let alone a bomber threat.

What 9/11 demonstrated, however, was that there was an aerial threat from within the border policed by NORAD, in the thousands of commercial and other flights that criss-cross the North American skies daily. Suddenly, NORAD had a renewed *raison d'être*, and since 2001 it has monitored all air traffic across Canada and the United States for unexplained flights and diversions.

The NORAD experience raises the question of what happens inside a common security perimeter, which is a crucial question for Canada as we contemplate the possibility of building any form of perimeter with the new US administration.

KEEPING BORDERS OPEN

The European Union provides useful markers for answering that question. The EU faces even greater pressures than North America to keep its internal borders open, and so in the late 1980s it attempted to eliminate them entirely.

BY DAVID MUTIMER

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A common border entails a range of policies within that borderland (immigration, refugee policy, and security checking) that have to be harmonized, or at least mutually accepted.

Such a radical step was unacceptable to some members, because it would have meant that anyone who entered one EU country could have moved to any other unchecked. The problems such movement raised were seen in largely economic and cultural terms, rather than as a question of security, although the latter was also clearly an issue. A common border entails a range of policies within that borderland (immigration, refugee policy, and security checking) that have to be harmonized, or at least mutually accepted—what the Europeans call *juste retour*.

The pressure to harmonize border policies predates the notion of a North American security perimeter. Immediately following the attacks of 9/11, the suggestion was made in the United States—including by the current secretary of state—that some of the attackers had entered the United States from Canada. Even when this quickly was shown not to be the case, there were calls for Canada to tighten immigration

and refugee rules to protect the United States. In order for the border to stay relatively open, Canada had to ensure the security of the United States.

The irony of these demands, of course, was that Canada had stronger controls on entry than did the United States. What is telling is that Canada did not loudly demand that the United States tighten its controls to meet Canada's standard and thereby ensure our common security.

Despite the absence of a common security standard, the North American security perimeter (NASP) idea was launched in 2005 by the United States, precisely in terms of security harmonization: "We are launching the next generation of our common security strategy to further secure North America and ensure the streamlined movement of legitimate travellers and cargo across our shared borders. To this end, Canada, the United States, and Mexico will work together to ensure the highest continent-wide security standards and streamlined risk-based border processes are achieved." This initial statement of intent from the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America Security Agenda was followed by an outlining of the key areas of security in which the three countries would work to implement common strategies and standards. Canada was being invited to fold most of its internal security into a continental system, in order to maintain easy access across the Canada-US border.

WHAT ARE WE GETTING OURSELVES INTO?

The question facing Canada at this juncture, therefore, is what sort of internal security regime will be contained by the perimeter? The answer to this question can only be answered in working together with the new administration. We should count ourselves lucky we have this chance. If the NASP had been more fully developed in the past three years, Canada would have been harmonizing

with the security regime enacted by the recently departed Bush administration—to any greater degree than has already happened. It is not an exaggeration to say that the security regime constructed by the Bush administration marks an assault on the foundation of democracy in individual rights and the rule of law. The features of this assault are both well known and extraordinary, symbolized by the prison installation at Guantanamo Bay.

Guantanamo was built explicitly to remove accused terrorists from the reach of US courts—that is, to construct the central response to global terrorism outside the rule of law. Having attempted to build a zone of legal exclusion domestically, the administration then sought to exempt it from international law by not only trying to except prisoners from the Geneva Conventions by inventing the “unlawful combatant” label, but attacking the very legitimacy of international humanitarian law by suggesting that it is not applicable to contemporary warfare. The attack on liberties and the guarantees of the rule of law spread virulently outward from Guantanamo. Torture was sanctioned within its walls and outsourced to other countries through the escalation of the repugnant program of “extraordinary rendition”—sending Canadian Maher Arar among others to be tortured abroad.

Even within the United States, the attack continued on due process and the civil guarantees, which are supposed to be the hallmark of “the world’s first democracy.” Early in the “war on terror,” the Bush administration proposed the TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System) program. TIPS involved enrolling service people (for example, cable repairmen) to report on any suspicious behaviour they encountered when they entered people’s houses. Even in the aftermath of 9/11, the US Congress could not accept the idea of citizens informing on one another, and so TIPS was never implemented. The White House has, however, admitted to authorizing illegal, indeed unconstitutional, spying on its own citizens.

With an incoming administration, there is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to help to shape that harmonized future.

THE NASP: A WAY FORWARD

For all I have said critically, a common security perimeter remains a seemingly sensible idea. For it to be feasible, each must trust in the security of the borders that they do not share—and, at least for the United States, that is unlikely to be accomplished through *juste retour*. The United States is likely only to trust our immigration and refugee standards—for example, our judgment of who is or is not a terrorist—if our policies and procedures largely mirror their own. Canada is thus in a position in which harmonizing, even further, its approach to security with the United States will be all but essential. With an incoming administration, there is a tremendous opportunity for Canada to help to shape that harmonized future.

For the Obama administration, the NASP will continue to be a very good idea. President Obama faces one of the most difficult economic crises of the past century, and while there will be strong protectionist temptations, the memory of Smoot-Hawley and the Great Depression are likely to foster a strong desire for continued, even enhanced, trade. Canada remains near the top of the list of US trading partners, and the United States is, of course, right at the top of Canada’s, and so the open border between the two is in the interests of both economies despite the rise of US protectionism and Buy American provisions.

Politically, the new president’s greatest weakness is on security, and so he will face pressure to be strong and be seen to be strong, but he does have opportunities to redefine strength in ways other than the discredited policies of his predecessor. Indeed, the incoming Obama administration seems set on reorienting the US security regime in a rather more liberal direction—beginning with the rapid closure of the symbol of

its illiberal predecessor, Guantanamo Bay. For Canada, this provides an important opportunity.

Working with the new administration to make that changed regime consistent with Canada’s commitment to the rule of law could greatly benefit both countries. A new regime can be constructed either by harmonizing our internal security policies—the rules for letting people and goods into the country, and the means of monitoring them once they are here—or by openly agreeing with the United States to recognize the validity of each other’s systems. In either event, institutionalizing the system within a shared perimeter will make it difficult to change unilaterally, on either side of the Canada-US border. 

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Mexico, security, and the towering task before the Mexican state

A FAILED STATE?

Mexico is having a hard time trying to deal with its own security problems. These include the further expansion of drug cartel activities into US border states where they have long been the major suppliers of drugs to American consumers. Indeed, experts are of the view that Mexican trafficking organizations also network with terrorist organizations whose purposes go well beyond drug smuggling.

There has been speculation in the media about radical Iranian Islamist organizations training members of the Gulf and Sinaloa cartels. Allegedly, they provide instruction in five areas: arms and explosives, tactics, leadership, training, and commando operations. The expansion of cartel activities, and with that expansion the intensification of the bribery and blackmail of government officials, poses an imminent threat to the rule of law in the United States. In a nutshell, the risks for American homeland security certainly increase because the United States shares the most active border in the world with, in the words of *The Economist*, “a narco state as their neighbour.” The actual reign of fear, much in evidence in the daily life of Mexico, has given Mexico—fairly or unfairly—the label of a failed state.

The fact is the Mexican government has taken on what may be the most titanic task in the history of the country, namely, the fight against the scourge of organized crime. However, the very real danger is that the Mexican state is failing to win this fight against the ruthless tactics of the drug gangs, and this is because those in power formerly and those currently responsible for leading the fight have been complicit and closed their eyes to the aims, actions, and instincts of the drug gangs.

BY JOSÉ LUIS VALDÉS-UGALDE

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The question is not yet whether or not Mexico is a failed state, but whether it is drifting irreversibly toward ungovernability.

THE “COLOMBIANIZATION” OF MEXICO

The Mexican government is now forced to demonstrate to the world that its sovereignty has not failed and that its strategy against the crime syndicates can be both timely and smart. As a result, Mexico cannot yet, as a nation, aspire to be taken seriously as a partner of the United States in bilateral and regional arenas where the two countries need to work together. The current Mexican administration is not able to show that it is capable of managing its all too real domestic security problems effectively, let alone contribute to the strengthening of the North American security perimeter. The question is not yet whether or not Mexico is a failed state, but whether it is drifting irreversibly toward ungovernability. If this is the case, will the result be a return of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) to the presidency in 2012 and an authoritarian reversal of the political democratic transition, which began in 2000?

For the last ten years, the Mexican state has failed to provide public security at a level that meets North American standards. It has been disastrously unable to enforce internal rules of law to protect Mexicans from the criminal gangs, which operate with what many see as impunity. For these reasons, Mexico’s image and prestige have been severely damaged. Although Mexico is not what Colombia was at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, the Mexican press is filled with references to the “Colombianization” of Mexico because of the escalation of violence and the power of transnational criminal organizations. However, despite these comparisons, there are factors, such as narco-trafficking with its links to the illegal migration into Mexico from Central America and the absence of narco-guerrillas like the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), among others, that make Mexico’s war against crime a unique problem that requires a Mexican policy response.

THE MEXICAN BIPOLAR CONDITION

The Mexican government, for its part, has been using the chauvinistic argument of blaming Mexico’s security crisis on the US demand for heroin. The Calderon government has adopted a defensive, paranoid position, but instead of playing the blame game, it needs to accept the gravity of its homegrown crisis and begin to act as follows:

- strengthen the rule of law and the culture of legality as a fundamental measure to fight the cartels;
- engage in a deeper housecleaning of corrupt state institutions, which are dangerously infiltrated by the cartels;

- vigorously attack and punish the complicity and corruption of local and federal authorities;
- think seriously and responsibly about the need to professionalize the different police forces within a greater framework of a comprehensive judicial reform;
- streamline the criminal and political intelligence unit, the Center for Research and National Security (CISEN), to justify the enormous budget that has been earmarked for it; and
- propose a multidimensional risk-reduction agenda jointly with the United States, which is truly the towering task before the Mexican state.

Unfortunately, the evidence before us indicates that a sustainable national consensus remains far from complete, and that in Mexico, under the current conditions, such a consensus is unachievable. A spate of recent US government reports—see, among others, the National Drug Intelligence Center's *National Drug Threat Assessment* (US Justice Department) and the *CRS Report for Congress: Mexico's Drug Cartels* (Congressional Research Service) leave little room for doubt that the prevailing perception among US decision-makers is that Mexico has gone off the rails in many areas of common concern. As a result, our mutual security is in danger.

This perception has damaged Mexico's reputation and has led to many US politicians forgetting that drug trafficking and money laundering are global in nature. Thus, if the Obama administration wants to preserve its national security perimeter—including the security management of its borders—it will have to ask itself frankly to what extent Mexico's security crisis is a risk for US security. Then it must find ways to act responsibly in coordination with Mexico to tackle these transnational threats. This response must include measures to detect and deal with the more than 35 million Americans, according to 2007 estimates, who use illicit drugs or abuse medications.

Mexico is facing the greatest crisis in public life since the Mexican Revolution, and its response should reflect the magnitude of the problem.

The response will also have to confront the crime wave plaguing at least 230 US cities nationwide in which Mexican drug gangs have extended their operations, including major cities such as Chicago, Miami, and Los Angeles. At the same time, a clever strategy is necessary to fight the huge black market in high-powered weapons imported into Mexico from the United States. The \$10 million allocated for Project Gunrunner in the economic stimulus package, to target illicit US gun-trafficking networks, is definitely not enough to deal with the fact that more than 2,000 heavy-calibre weapons enter Mexico from the United States every day. Experts estimate that 90 percent of the firearms confiscated in drug crimes in Mexico come from the United States (730,000 per year is the total estimated by the US Senate).

NOT A FAILED STATE BUT A FAILED STRATEGY

The bilateral effort should go beyond programs like the Merida Initiative, a security cooperation assistance package for Mexico, Central America, and two Caribbean countries, Haiti and Dominican Republic. In fact, it is very probable that the Merida Initiative is inadequate to the task and has failed to stop the trafficking of guns and drugs, as can be seen in the aforementioned Washington reports. Indeed, the US war on drugs is considered by many to be a failure. In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed (February 23, 2009), former Latin American presidents

call for a paradigm shift in drug policies from interdiction and criminalization of consumption toward an approach that focuses on reducing consumer demand and treating the drug epidemic as a public health problem.

This frank recognition of the failure of existing programs makes us question the strategies currently in force. Under such examination one finds that the Merida Initiative is too narrowly conceived to have the desired effects. Most of the budget is going to contain the cross-border trade in narcotics, reduce criminal terrorism, and strengthen border security. Large amounts of money and technology are being transferred to Mexican police forces, yet this may fall into the hands of corrupt elements of the police and military. To make matters worse, recent events—the \$150 million cut in financial assistance provided by the Initiative and the US decision to delay sending to Mexico the helicopters and aircrafts needed in the fight against narco-terrorists—send the wrong signals to Mexicans. If the ultimate intention is to ensure closer cooperation with Mexican authorities, it is counterproductive to reduce the resources that are badly needed in the war against the drug gangs. The legalization of drugs remains a taboo topic, and its enactment is far from probable, in either Mexico or the United States.

To be more effective in the war on drugs, both Mexico and the United States need to reconsider their strategies. Although Washington's response has started to improve, it is still too timid. For example, on February 25, 2009, US Attorney General Eric Holder announced the results of the 21-month Operation Xcellerator. These included 755 arrests of criminal elements, many linked to the Sinaloa drug cartel, 23 tons of narcotics, 169 weapons, vehicles, ships, and even planes, plus the seizure of \$59 million in cash and \$6.5 million in other assets. However, much more needs to be done and the seizures to date represent only a modest beginning. For its part, Mexico needs to contribute more to an integrated

The resurgence of Can-Am liberalism: A study in ambiguity

THE NEW LIBERALISM

The global economic crisis, combined with the election of Barack Obama, has led to increased interest in the possibility of a resurgent progressive liberalism in the United States. This liberalism calls for a more engaged public sphere working with civil society to promote citizen engagement and a renewed social contract. Canadians, inspired by Obama's meteoric rise, are demanding similar leadership from Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In both countries, it is hoped that this renewed liberalism will overcome the democratic deficit and reduce socioeconomic inequality produced by two decades of neo-liberal policies of regressive taxation, deregulation, and privatization that benefited relatively few.

However, recent actions suggest that if there is a return to a more progressive liberalism, the lead will come from the United States. While many Canadians see themselves and their governments as more "progressive" than Americans and their governments, Obama's early actions on pay equity, union rights, the environment, and of course on economic stimulus, challenge this claim. The Harper government claims that its actions are an adequate response to crisis, but a closer examination suggests otherwise. Moreover, the fact that the main federal opposition, Michael Ignatieff's Liberals, supported the budget, did not address its many weaknesses, and, indeed, have been vocal deficit hawks, suggests that the return to progressive liberalism in Canada may yet again be forestalled.

YES WE CAN!

Obama's victory was a product of the widespread discontent over the damaging economic and social policies of the Bush era. In particular, George W. Bush's tax cuts disproportionately benefited the

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wealthy at a time when a growing number of middle- and lower-class Americans were struggling, and many were losing their homes. The 2003 invasion of Iraq squandered a large reserve of goodwill that the United States had accumulated following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. By 2008, global anti-Americanism was at record heights, and many Americans longed for a return to a more idealistic foreign policy in which America reflects positive democratic ideals.

The Obama victory was fuelled by the promise of *significant*, and not simply rhetorical, change. Obama's slogan, "Yes we can!," was more than a political tool—it reignited a public desire for change that had long lain dormant. The American public expressed a strong desire for a more progressive American

agenda in areas like health care, tax reform, infrastructure, the environment, and foreign policy.

Although less dramatic, Canadians have expressed a similar desire for a more progressive agenda; however, their governments often have not delivered. Since the election of the Chrétien Liberals in 1993, Canadians have heard politicians offer platforms that supposedly promoted Canadian values of equality and social progress. Despite a rhetoric of infrastructure development, the Liberals emphasized economic individualism and a retrenchment of the state's economic role. Debt reduction and tax cuts were the key economic actions, to the detriment of social policy, notably education and health care, which polls repeatedly showed Canadians desired as a first priority. Not surprisingly, socioeconomic inequality, contrary to the political rhetoric, increased during the 1990s and into the new century.

The Harper government, first elected in 2006, continued this orientation, emphasizing tax cuts and tax credit changes and a law and order agenda that are largely outside the Canadian consensus. They squandered significant budget surpluses with a two-point cut to the GST and non-strategic spending that reflected political considerations and a desire to hamstring the federal government's ability to act in the future. Only after the proposed coalition of opposition parties threatened to defeat his government did Mr. Harper muse publicly about stimulus measures designed to weather the economic storm.

Both publics have largely rejected the failed policies of the neo-liberal era and are supportive of *meaningful* stimulus packages. They do not want government spending for the sake of appearing to do something. They want their governments to combine immediate economic relief and short-term stabilization with a longer-term strategy that addresses the

challenges of global warming, deindustrialization, and social equity.

CAN WE? WILL WE?

However, a cautionary note is required. As we know, nobody gets their hopes dashed more rapidly than progressives when their party takes power or when conditions are ripe for significant policy change. The timid economic strategy of the Bob Rae NDP government in Ontario and Bill Clinton's neo-liberal agenda (cutting social entitlements, introducing workfare, economic deregulation that contributed to the current crisis) remind us that rhetoric and public perceptions do not necessarily translate into action.

In this sense, Obama's initial actions have been mixed. On the one hand, he has sent clear messages that he will promote equity issues, as seen in his first piece of legislation, the *Fair Pay Act*. He has also sent signals that green technologies and tougher environmental standards will be promoted. On the other hand, Obama has appointed Clinton administration veterans like Larry Summers to key economic portfolios. Of course, the Clinton administration enabled the deregulatory policy environment that contributed to the current crash. Former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, whose tight money campaign amplified the recession of the early 1980s, was also enlisted as an adviser.

Thus, while Obama has rhetorically emphasized change and action, he has already tried to lower expectations by emphasizing the severity of the crisis; this suggests that potentially costly initiatives on health care, social security reform, and the environment might be delayed. Debates over the size of the stimulus package and calls for much broader action from liberal economists like Paul Krugman and Robert Reich indicate that Obama may be doing just enough to placate the left. In other words, despite the theme of change, it very well could be politics as usual in DC.

A BREAK WITH PAST POLICIES?

In Canada, despite much discussion of Stephen Harper abandoning his neo-

[P]rogressives on both sides of the border, while understandably buoyed by changes in political rhetoric promising more activist government, must remain cautious.

liberal roots, the 2009 budget does not address key issues that promote social equity; indeed, the budget is likely to reinforce rather than challenge the neo-liberal policy tendencies of the past few decades. The total stimulus package is estimated to be \$32 to \$35 billion, barely meeting the internationally agreed stimulus target of 2 percent of GDP. However, final spending could be less, since much of this spending is contingent upon the provinces and municipalities offering matching funds. The government has also stated that this spending is a short-term, "one-off" initiative. The spending plans address numerous political and economic constituencies but, unlike Obama's stimulus plan, precious little (\$1 billion over five years) is for environmental plans or green infrastructure, and little money is dedicated to transforming the economy into a green, smart economy.

But what is most troubling is the large tax cuts included in the budget: \$20 billion in permanent income tax cuts and \$4.4 billion for business and payroll tax cuts. Planned corporate tax cuts will continue as scheduled. Harper's spending and his income tax and GST cuts produced a \$1 billion deficit for 2008–9, plus a \$15 billion *structural* deficit for 2009–10. The federal government anticipates deficits totalling \$84 billion over the next five years.


The combination of permanent tax cuts and large deficits suggests that Harper remains more interested in limit-

ing the state's ability to act as an economic partner than in redefining the state's role in order to reflect the desires of the public in changing economic conditions. Most of the spending will occur in the next two years, and the Conservatives hope that Canada will be out of the recession by then, with only the deficits remaining. Given that balanced budgets have become the norm in Canadian politics (with the Liberals leading the charge), and given the difficulty of campaigning on tax *increases* to restore lost revenues, the only possible conclusion one can draw is that in a post-recession era, program review and more cuts to the state will be needed to balance the budget.

Moreover, social equity continues to be a target. Pay equity disputes, for example, will be returned to the collective bargaining process, effectively weakening current legislation. In addition, despite the professed concern for the unemployed and for those Canadians who might lose their jobs, the budget did not address employment insurance reform. It remains difficult to obtain, and waiting periods for benefits remain long in many parts of the country. This lack of concern was reflected in Minister Diane Finley's post-budget comments: "We do not want to make it lucrative for [unemployed workers] to stay home and get paid for it."

With the Liberal opposition accepting the budget without demanding any changes, it is clear that the Liberals are more interested in returning to power than in fundamentally reshaping the policy agenda.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Thus, progressives on both sides of the border, while understandably buoyed by changes in political rhetoric promising more activist government, must remain cautious. They must remain vigilant and continue to pressure for change. Obama's message of hope has engaged many people, but if we have politics and *policies* as usual on both sides of the border, then their hopes will yet again be dashed. 

program of drugs and weapons seizures and the arrest of gang members. In addition, it must mount its own comprehensive agenda that makes sense and, most important, delivers results.

A shift in strategy is required with a move away from uncoordinated policy responses and mere assistance packages. An improved bilateral framework of cooperation must include a multilevel strategy that addresses nationally the culture of illegality, a developmental program for drug-crops replacement, and the public health side of the problem. It must include a genuine compromise on intelligence cooperation, gun control, and extradition, and the drafting of a bilateral and trilateral risk agenda. It is not an exaggeration to argue that Mexico is facing the greatest crisis in public life since the Mexican Revolution, and its response should reflect the magnitude of the problem.

THE PROSPECTS FOR TRILATERALISM


The need to rethink Mexico's response to narco-terrorism from top to bottom becomes even more pressing when we see how differently Canada and the United States deal with their common security problems. On President Obama's recent visit to Canada, it is significant that when he talked with Prime Minister Harper about their joint future as members of NAFTA there was hardly a mention of Mexico. Both leaders boasted that they shared so much in common, especially stressing their trade interdependence. Also noteworthy was Harper's strong statement that "[t]hreats to the United States are threats to Canada. There is no such thing as a threat to the national security of the United States, which does not represent a direct threat to this country [Canada]." That is, the United States and Canada posed security as a common issue intimately linked to their different domestic situations, and they look to the future in an affirmative way where they will propose viable solu-

tions to each other. This event inevitably leads Mexican observers to rethink questions often raised in Mexico around US-Mexico and US-Canada bilateral relations and of the sustainability of the trilateral relationship between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

At moments of crisis, it appears that Canada takes better advantage of its relationship with the United States than Mexico does. Apart from trade issues, Mexico and Canada deal with transnational problems, such as security and immigration, separately with Washington. However, the war on drugs will not succeed with Canada and Mexico operating within their "solitudes" simply because the bulk of the cocaine in Canada comes from Mexican cartels via Canadian-based organized crime routed through middlemen in major US cities to arrive in Vancouver and Toronto.

What then are the "hidden" barriers to cooperation between Mexico, Canada,

and the United States? I would say there are two: Mexican passiveness and lack of international political leverage, and a historical cultural apathy toward and underestimation of Mexico, by both Canada and the United States, as an equal partner, because of development gaps and governance limitations.

It seems that Mexico is incapable of performing as a reliable and constructive partner. At the same time, Mexico and the United States are dealing with their bilateral issues at the expense of deepening the trilateral security agenda. This makes it very difficult to defend Mexico's role in and the trilateral character of the North American integration process. If the United States and Canada have overlooked Mexico in their respective strategic stands on security, as it appears they have, Mexico must remind them forcefully that it is a central part of the equation if regional security is to be successfully guaranteed. 

North America Next: A Report to President Obama on Building Sustainable Security and Competitiveness

February 10, 2009, 10:00 am

National Press Club, Washington, DC

[T]he North American Center for Transborder Studies (NACTS) at Arizona State University will formally release the findings of a year-long effort, "North America Next: A Memo to President Obama on Building Sustainable Security and Competitiveness" as part of the National Press Club's "Morning Newsmaker" program in Washington, DC.

Speakers at the Newsmaker event included . . . U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Canada, Mexico and NAFTA, and Colin Robertson, a senior Canadian diplomat currently directing Canada-US project at Carleton University in Ottawa. . . .

The objective of this initiative, which was undertaken by NACTS with the input of its trinational Board of Advisors, its faculty advisors and a large group of private and public sector partners, is to promote a more cooperative, secure, sustainable, and competitive North America. The release of the recommendations is timed to coincide with the new President and his administration settling in and searching for details and implementation mechanisms for their visions.

<http://nacts.asu.edu/north-america-next>

Partners in higher education: People-driven integration

PARTNERS IN TRADE

Independent of whether one is in favour of or against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the figures on free trade in North America indisputably point to a process of increasing economic integration among the three countries of the region. Trade among the three countries went from \$286 billion in 1993 to \$846 billion in 2006. For both Mexico and Canada, the United States is their first partner in international trade; Canada is the United States' first partner and Mexico its third. These are the cold facts of economic integration in North America.

The problem is that, in contrast to the European experience of integration, in North America the economic process is not occurring hand in hand with the political will of the governments to create institutions. Therefore, despite the very serious common challenges faced by the three countries—such as immigration, security, and drug trafficking—we do not see in North America the definition of a regional public policy agenda.

POLICY GAPS

An excellent example of these regional policy gaps is the issue of cooperation in higher education. The figures are again crystal clear. The United States is, by far, the country attracting the most foreign students in the world. In 2006, there were over 580,000 foreign students enrolled in American universities. This practically doubles the figure of international students going to England, which is the second attracting country in the world.

What is the regional origin of the international students going to American universities? Most of

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[W]e do not see in North America the definition of a regional public policy agenda.

them come from Asia (59 percent), Europe (15 percent), and Latin America (12 percent). Only 5 percent are from North America. India, China, and South Korea were the countries sending the highest number of students to the United States in 2006: 83,833, 67,723, and 62,392, respectively. (See Table 1.)

The same year, there were 28,280 Canadian students going to the United States and only 13,826 from Mexico. On the other hand, most American students going abroad go to European countries. In 2005, 32,109 American students went to England, and 26,078 to Italy. In contrast, only 10,022 went to Mexico, and less than 2,000 American students went to Canada.

What have the North American governments done in the past to increase regional student mobility? Not much really. In the light of NAFTA, they created the North American Student Mobility Program in 1995, but the results have been mixed—the program was suspended in some years. The Mobility Program has promoted the creation of the North American University Consortia for student exchange. By 2008, 106 Consortia had received funding from the three governments, and approximately 600 universities had participated in the program. (The success of these Consortia in reaching their goals in student mobility has varied, but there is no space in this article to analyze the causes of such variation.)

The governments have also supported the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC), a North American organization based at the University of Arizona with the challenging mission of

TABLE 1 American students enrolled abroad by host country

Year	Host country	Number of students	As % of all American students abroad
2005	England	32,109	14.4
2005	Italy	26,078	11.7
2005	Spain	21,881	9.8
2005	Mexico	10,022	4.5
2005	Canada	Under 2,000	Under 1

TABLE 2 Foreign students in the USA

Year	Host country	Number of students	As % of all foreign students in the USA
2005	India	83,833	14.4
2005	China	67,723	11.6
2005	South Korea	62,392	10.7
2005	Taiwan	29,094	5.0
2005	Canada	28,280	4.9
2005	Mexico	13,826	2.4

Source: Open Doors, Institute of International Education, New York.

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developing institutional networks and student mobility among regional higher education institutions. Despite these praiseworthy efforts, the numbers reveal there has not been a change in the flows of international student exchanges with American universities, which continue to favour Asia and Europe.

NORTH AMERICA'S BRAIN DRAIN: THE OPTIONS

Furthermore, there is also a serious problem of "brain drain" in the region. The United States, the richest of the three countries, offers a very strong research infrastructure and university system, attracting numerous Canadian and Mexican scientists. Canada also has an active policy to attract foreign scientists, as well as qualified individuals, in a more general sense. More and more Mexicans are taking advantage of such policies. The problem is complex. The debate nowadays is whether the international flows of "brain mobility" bring long-term benefits to the countries of origin of these qualified migrants. India, China, and South Korea are often pointed to as examples of positive impact. In Canada and Mexico, however, such an impact is not as obvious as it is for the Asian countries. In Mexico's case, because of the serious problem of economic underdevelopment and poverty, it is quite clear that there is a constant need for highly educated graduates and scientists.

Hence, to the question of what the North American agenda in higher education and science should be, I would respond by posing the following questions: What do we want for the future of the region? Do we want economic integration combined with higher education dislocation? Which of these scenarios is best for the societies and governments of the three countries, as well as for the future of the region?

We should look at the European Union when seeking responses to these questions. It has been the regional institutions created by the European governments that assumed the leadership role

Only a strong conviction shared by Washington, Ottawa, and Mexico City about the utmost relevance of regional cooperation in higher education will make this scheme work.

required to induce substantive change in international education. As we know well, the Bologna Process adopted by the EU in 1999 defined a plan for a gradual convergence of the educational systems of the member countries. Furthermore, through specific programs such as Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, or Socrates, the EU has actively promoted the movement of students within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. Higher education has already been internationalized in Europe, and this fact will represent an important comparative advantage for Europe in the future competition with other economic regions such as North America.


MAKE HIGHER EDUCATION A POLICY PRIORITY

What is my policy prescription for the new American administration and the governments of Canada and Mexico? The first and most important recom-

mendation is that regional higher education has to become a priority in the regional policy agenda, at the same level as immigration, security, and trade. First-rank cabinet ministers—the secretaries of education and foreign affairs or someone in the president's or prime minister's office—should be directly involved in the definition of a regional plan and policies for cooperation in higher education.

A regional permanent Commission on Higher Education Cooperation should be created and financed by the three governments. This is not an expensive and bureaucratically heavy initiative. All that is required is an office with minimum staff, an executive director appointed by the three governments, and a board composed of government and non-government (university presidents, scholars, scientists) representatives from the three countries. Such representatives should be truly committed to higher education cooperation in North America.

But the crucial factor for such a commission to be effective is that the executives of the three countries fully support its mission. Only a strong conviction shared by Washington, Ottawa, and Mexico City about the utmost relevance of regional cooperation in higher education will make this scheme work.

Finally, it would be a strategic mistake to link regional initiatives in this issue area to the future of NAFTA. As stated at the beginning, with or without NAFTA, the regional process of economic integration will keep advancing at full speed. Cooperation in higher education, in such a scenario, will always be a win-win result for the three countries. 

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Mexico in Latin America: The elusive relations with Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela

MEXICO AND LATIN AMERICA

There are a series of misunderstandings regarding Mexico's relations with Latin America. The first is the notion that the region can be treated as a homogeneous entity. The truth is Latin America is a mixed group of nations, which vary greatly in terms of geography, culture, size, demographic density, and levels of development. This diversity has been thrown into sharp relief over recent years by an emergent group of radically left-wing nations whose notions of economic development, of democratic practice, and of international behaviour differ from other countries in the region. In these circumstances, it makes little sense to refer to Mexico's relation with Latin America as a whole; this relationship can only be understood in view of specific ties created with particular countries.

The second misunderstanding is the notion that Mexico could easily aspire to leadership in the region. Nothing could be further from the truth. Latin America is divided into various subregions that share very little with Mexico in political terms. This is particularly evident in South America, where processes of integration and political orchestration have left Mexico lagging. The achievements of the South American Union of Nations (*Unión Sudamericana de Naciones*), a mechanism for political coordination that Mexico was not invited to join, is a good example of this situation.

Mexico's situation in Latin America can only be evaluated through the particular understandings—profound or superficial, long-lasting or transitory, affectionate or fuelled by resentment—achieved with specific nations. The construction of such understandings is undoubtedly a central task for Mexico's foreign policy. And yet, there is no clear

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Latin America is divided into various subregions that share very little with Mexico in political terms.

explanation for the manner and the means with which relations have been woven with certain nations. Three examples clearly come to mind: Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela.

CUBA

The rebuilding of relations with Cuba has been a priority goal for Felipe Calderon's foreign policy. Many obstacles had to be overcome so that the famous "you eat and you then leave" ("*comes y te vas*"), and the many misunderstandings that followed in its wake, could be laid to rest. Although a total breakdown of relations between the two countries did not actually take place, it came very close. To heal this relationship clearly called for concessions and diplomatic handling, which have been very successfully accomplished. Felipe Perez Roque's highly publicized visit to Mexico and Felipe Calderon's announced trip to Cuba are good examples of the salubrious state of the relationship.

We might, however, have reason to wonder about the benefits or costs of this carefully structured reconciliation. It is to Mexico's advantage to normalize relations with this key player among the

group of radically left-wing nations in Latin America and a country that resonates with many Caribbean and African nations whose votes can be crucial within multilateral organizations. However, this does not provide Mexico with an enhanced margin for political action among other players in the international arena. During the 1960s and early 1970s, being the only nation in Latin America to retain relations with the Island was simultaneously a source of prestige and of *silent* understandings with the United States. Today, Mexico's good relations with Cuba add little to the former's international standing.

BRAZIL

Mexico's relationship with Brazil is of a very different nature. While both are considered emerging nations because of the size of their economies, territory, and population, they differ greatly in terms of their approach to foreign policy. Brazil seeks to strengthen its regional influence, diversify its economic relations, enhance its presence in international forums, and participate in international security mechanisms, such as peace keeping operations (PKOs). Mexico is reluctant to take centre stage in multilateral forums, has concentrated its economic relations almost wholly with the United States, and is one of the few nations in Latin America that does not participate in PKOs.

Despite these differences, recent circumstances, most particularly the growing international economic crisis, should foster a greater level of understanding between the two nations. Their joint action will be required to ensure that the emerging powers can improve their position within the mechanisms that will oversee the reconstruction of the global

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financial system. Furthermore, their cooperation could serve as a buttress for the Latin American nations in the shifting tides of international economic relations. Only Mexico and Brazil, together, can provide the region with the political weight required.

However, and despite certain recent efforts, such as the creation of a Bi-National Mexico-Brazil Commission, relations between the two nations are just cordial, though certainly not as intense and close as they should be. They have failed to capture the imaginations of the media and the Mexican Congress, unlike Mexico's renewed friendship with Cuba.

VENEZUELA

The case of Venezuela occupies a different context. Mexico's poor relations with that country during the government of Vicente Fox—which reflected the ideology that prevailed among the leadership of the Partido Acción Nacional, as well as the perception, justified or otherwise, that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had contributed economically to the campaign of Mexico's left-wing leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador—led to verbal confrontations between the presidents of both countries, which escalated to unprecedented levels. For a certain period, diplomatic relations barely covered trade issues; the atmosphere of the relationship as a whole could hardly have been worse.

Thus, it was surprising to find that the National Action Party (PAN) presidency of Felipe Calderon would decide that improving relations with Venezuela should be a central item in its foreign policy agenda. A good diplomatic handling, gestures of cordiality, and the reassignment of new ambassadors by both parties have put an end to the era of open confrontation. However, the relationship is not characterized by the level of cordiality that we observe in the case of Cuba. The nationalization of the Mexican Company CEMEX by the Venezuelan government and the difficulty of

Its position is the sum of specific relationships with scattered countries in the region, which rarely, if ever, have achieved a true and viable partnership.

locating reliable interlocutors within Chavez's government, in view of the peculiar manner that said government conducts its diplomatic affairs, have prevented a significant bond.

A LOOK TO FUTURE RELATIONS

There are no elements within the three preceding examples that might lead us to affirm that there is a clear project in Mexico's foreign policy to build influence through strategic alliances with particular Latin American nations. The interest in finding a new level of reconciliation with Cuba and Venezuela served to distin-

guish the clumsy and sometimes strident foreign policies of Vicente Fox from the somewhat more professional diplomatic handling implemented by Calderon; it is comprehensible, yet insufficient.

Not only in the case of Brazil, but also with other South American nations that should be of interest for Mexico, such as Chile, relations rarely go beyond presidential encounters full of grand promises but short on concrete results that might lead to long-standing strategic alliances.

One result has been uncertainty regarding Mexico's weight in the region. Over the coming few months, certain nations will put their influence to the test—from the Summit of the Americas, in April of this year, to which Mexico could contribute by proposing a joint Latin American standpoint through the Grupo del Rio, through the events convoked by nations that, along with Mexico, celebrate the bicentennial of their independence in 2010.

It would be an illusion to believe that Mexico will automatically be a leader, or a privileged interlocutor, at such events. Its position is the sum of specific relationships with scattered countries in the region, which rarely, if ever, have achieved a true and viable partnership. ❁

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When North American integration is reduced to a snail's pace: Three strategic areas for future cooperation

NORTH AMERICAN INTEGRATION AT THE CROSSROADS

The election of Barack Obama has generated widespread euphoria about change. This phenomenon is not restricted to the United States; it is shared around the world, especially in Canada and Mexico. His administration is focused on the triple crisis that the United States faces: security and the war against terrorism, the unprecedented economic recession and job loss, and the growth of global anti-Americanism under Bush. During the next four years, the Obama administration will face the difficult challenge of solving these crises. For North America, this preoccupation with rescuing the domestic economy from the grips of the worst recession since the Great Depression will reduce to a snail's pace the dynamics of North American integration as Canada and Mexico have experienced it.

The most important bilateral relation for Canada and Mexico, in terms of international affairs, is the United States. In fact, the vast majority of Canada's and Mexico's foreign policy issues are bound, directly or indirectly, to their relation with the United States. The United States is their most important export market, the primary source of imports and foreign direct investment, and the preferred country for emigration for millions of Mexicans. Since the signing of NAFTA in 1994, the intensity of this relationship has increased dramatically, and thus, currently, the single international factor that most decisively affects Canada's and Mexico's economic, political, and foreign policies is US domestic and foreign policies. Therefore, whatever happens during the Obama administration will have a considerable effect north and south of the border.

BY JORGE A. SCHIAVON

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Unless Canada and Mexico can find a strategic way to participate in assisting the Obama administration to lessen the US crisis, they will be on the receiving end of Obama's huge public policy agenda for sweeping change.

THREE AREAS FOR STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Solving the triple crisis is the highest priority for President Obama. Yet, Canada and Mexico, given the enormous asymmetry of power vis-à-vis the United States, have foreign policy priorities that are strikingly similar. They need to contain, as far as possible, the negative effects of US hegemony, and to juggle this, as much as possible, to benefit from sharing a border, with privileged access to the world's biggest market.

Unless Canada and Mexico can find a strategic way to participate in assisting the Obama administration to lessen the

US crisis, they will be on the receiving end of Obama's huge public policy agenda for sweeping change. This might jeopardize both their privileged relationship with the United States and disrupt the process of integration in North America. Regionalization has to be perceived as part of the solution to the triple crisis. Because the incentive in the United States toward isolation and unilateral action will increase as domestic pressures intensify to solve the US economic crisis quickly, innovation and change have to come from Mexico and Canada in the three areas of strategic cooperation.

SECURITY

First, in terms of security, the Canadian and Mexican borders are being depicted in the media as areas of high concern. However, with the right strategy, they can be presented as spaces of cooperation to achieve much-needed regional security in North America. After 9/11, the highest priority of US foreign policy was defined in terms of maintaining the security of its borders. However, the United States is unable to achieve this objective unilaterally. Only the Canadian and Mexican governments have the capacity to guarantee stability and security on the territories and borders they share with the United States. This requires strengthening government institutions in the fight against organized crime and terrorism, especially in Mexico, and improving state capacity in the areas of information, organization, technology, and infrastructure. Stronger neighbours and allies in North America are indispensable for achieving increased security on US borders, and this can be accomplished through strengthening regional security cooperation.

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THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Second, regarding the economic crisis, many US members of congress and senators are advocating protectionism, and pressures for the renegotiation of NAFTA will undoubtedly increase. Obama so far has spoken out against the protectionist lobby in Congress and the media. The free flow of goods, services, and capital is a reality in North America in most but not all areas of the economy. A reversal of this commitment to remove the last barriers and to deepen the benefits from an open economy would be catastrophic to the economies of all three countries.

Other lobby groups in the United States are demanding that Obama tighten environmental and labour standards, particularly in the case of Mexico. Rather than opposing these demands for higher environmental and labour standards, Mexico should modify its strategy and benefit from these demands for fundamental change in Mexico's domestic policies. Instead of concentrating exclusively on migratory reform in the United States, Mexico should advocate for labour market standards that are complementary to the aims and objectives of the Obama administration in this critical policy area. In addition, Mexico would increase its credibility in the area of climate change by strengthening the regional institutions in North America that promote more efficient and environmentally friendly production processes. This initiative would be received positively in both Canada and the United States.

INTERNATIONAL IMAGE


Finally, in terms of polishing the international image of the United States, the Obama presidency has its work cut out for itself in Europe, the Middle East, and the Arab world. But there is much to do right in its own backyard. The intensity of the US relationship with Canada and Mexico justifies starting right here in North America. This has to be highlighted in a coordinated way through all

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available government bureaucracies, every ministry, and every branch of government, as well as in civil society—for example, in unions, academia, NGOs, and business associations.

The integration of the economies and societies of North America is deepening every day, and there appears to be no turning back. The policies implemented by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States can only affect the speed of integration, making it faster or

slower. Because of the need for the Obama administration to provide concrete results, much will be different in the way that North American integration occurs, whatever its final goals.

Canada and Mexico must be innovative in their approach to regional diplomacy to ensure that the new North America is part of the solution and not part of the problem of the current security, economic, and international crises of the United States. 

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US energy strategy and the Obama presidency: Not quite the expected U-turn

Based on President Barack Obama's campaign energy proposal, certain changes can be foreseen in US energy policy. There will also be important international repercussions as the policy aims at transitioning toward alternative fuel sources and efficiency in fuel usage. These hold promise for extricating the US economy from the crushing financial crisis and unprecedented economic recession it is in. Obama's energy policy announces a break with America's current practices and incorporates new elements that, together with security goals, will have a direct impact on the energy policies of its two neighbours, Canada and Mexico.

A SMART STRATEGY

Although the United States has historically made attempts at energy self-sufficiency, the proposals were difficult to put into practice. Energy policies proposed by previous administrations emphasized the diversification of the supply sources geographically, rather than a drastic reduction in energy consumption. Theoretically, these proposals relied on making a distinction between the idea of energy vulnerability and the idea of dependence—that is to say, “America can be dependent but not necessarily vulnerable.” This approach supported increased and diversified oil imports as the cheapest and, strategically, the best alternative, although it became one of the biggest items on the commercial trade balance and 3 percent of the national GDP.

As 2009 begins, one of the central objectives of Obama's energy proposal is to confront the problem of energy dependence by reducing, over the next ten years, the auto industry's consumption of oil imports from the Middle East and Venezuela. With the transportation sector comprising 69 percent of national consumption, improving gas efficiency

BY ROSÍO VARGAS

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in the auto industry will allow for a reduction in imports. Climate change is another key issue in Obama's energy proposal. The United States seeks to become the leader in the design and development of a post-Kyoto regime, which would come into effect in 2012 when the current protocol ends. Not only do these efforts respond to Obama's personal convictions about the environment, they also involve the consideration that it is important for the United States to be seen as a leader in this key policy domain.

The proposal advocates caps on US greenhouse gas emissions to ensure they are 80 percent lower than 1999 levels by 2050. It is strategically significant for Obama to take up the cause of climate change because this is now a central part of the energy security policies in many countries and is associated with the transition toward alternative energy sources. Taking a leadership role in this field will allow the United States to create the market opportunities that will position American technologies well in other

markets. Efforts in this field will be accomplished by linking up with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Obama's proposal also seeks to improve efficiency and accelerate the advancement of low-carbon-content emissions technologies; so by attempting to construct a new international regime for climate change, the new president's proposal will have global repercussions.

THE STRATEGY IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

In a kind of neo-Keynesian proposal that supports auto and energy—two of the most important sectors of the economy—Obama's strategy will earmark US\$20 billion approved by the US Congress on February 18, 2009 to speed up the production and sale of hybrid cars, promote the development and commercialization of renewable fuels, encourage energy efficiency, reduce coal-powered electric plant emissions, stimulate the production of second-generation biofuels, and begin the transition to a digital electricity grid. Despite the fact that the size of the investment is small, given the magnitude of the effort required to transition toward other energy sources, the effort is commendable.

For the moment, the first steps have been taken on a legislative level. A large market is developing for renewable energy projects, starting with the emergence of requirements around renewable portfolio standards for electricity generation. Also, state and municipal governments, hospitals, and universities are offered tax breaks to encourage them to acquire renewable energy assets, and alternative public and private financing for this is being explored. On October 3, 2008, a law was passed giving a 30 percent federal tax credit to anyone investing in solar installations, with the

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aim of making the United States the world's largest market. On an international level, the impact of Obama's strategy and the efforts begun by the outgoing Bush administration together with the G8 will be important because they aim to place renewable energy technology mainly in developing nations using market criteria.

Unfortunately, in contrast to the Kyoto Protocol, the proposals being made now and the commitment to reduce emissions are voluntary, not mandatory. This raises an important concern: previous experience has shown that effective emissions reduction will fail if goals are not mandatory.

The efficient use of fuels is another option for reducing US oil dependency that at the same time contributes to support sectors in economic trouble like the auto industry. This will be achieved with the injection of approximately US\$4 billion in tax credits and guaranteed loans to ensure that the vehicles—one million electric hybrid vehicles by 2015—will be produced in the United States.

THE IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURS

Undoubtedly, these proposals will have important implications for the whole world and particularly for the United States' neighbours. Reducing US dependency on Mideast oil would certainly alter the strategic importance of this area to the West. Although the proposals do not outline a specific role for western hemisphere suppliers, and particularly Canada and Mexico, clearly their role will be fundamental because of geopolitics. They are "trustworthy" suppliers able to guarantee US energy security. Canada and Mexico can also further the United States' interest in reducing dependency on Venezuela, which is starting to move its crude to the Chinese market.

Canada contributes mightily to US energy security by the Alberta tar sands deposits and natural gas exports. Fifteen percent of US oil imports are sourced from Canada. Mexico will maximize oil

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production and, as a consequence, maintain its exportation levels to the US market under the Mexican energy reforms passed in October 2008 by incorporating multinational corporations and international service providers. Since little can be expected in the way of increased US oil production, given Obama's commitment to protect environmentally sensitive areas like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from productive activities, Canada and Mexico will continue to be strategically critical to the United States for increasing regional energy supply not only in fossil-based energy but in other areas as well.

Energy integration under US leadership will be broadened to include the enlargement of the Canadian and Ameri-

can electricity markets, the construction of re-gasification plants (NLG) in Mexico, the re-exportation of liquid natural gas to the US market from Canada, and the development of ethanol plants in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to export to the United States. All this will happen in a regional context that promises a gradual transition to other sources of energy. In the case of Mexico, this will mean constant pressure to privatize and deregulate the state-owned companies (PEMEX and CFE) in order to create more space for multinational corporations, especially from Spain, Great Britain, and the United States, in renewable fuels, natural gas, and oil. Whether this will come to pass remains to be seen. 

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The highly uncertain future of North American governance

Shortly after Barack Obama's widely celebrated electoral victory, Thomas d'Aquino, chief executive and president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), published an open letter to the president-elect in the *National Post*. D'Aquino reminded Obama that Canadians and Americans were cousins and that together, in the face of challenging economic times, we must stand firmly against the siren call of protectionism, and recapture the sense of urgency and momentum that had accelerated continental integration in the aftermath of 9/11.

DWINDLING SUPPORT

D'Aquino, together with the influential coalition of North American political and corporate elites that crafted the 2005 Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), a successor agreement to NAFTA, had many reasons to be apprehensive about the future of North American governance. The American electorate's resounding repudiation of the Republican Party left Stephen Harper, recently re-elected with another fragile minority government, as the last standing poster boy for unfettered market governance.

Even more disconcerting, during the protracted Democratic primary contest and the US presidential campaign, both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, now secretary of state, pledged to reopen NAFTA to better protect the environment, American workers, and American jobs. Perhaps most unsettling, the unfolding crisis in North American capitalism has not only fuelled a growing wave of protectionist sentiment in the United States, which may be partially soothed by a massive "shovel-ready" economic stimulus package, but also decimated public confidence in markets and neo-liberal fundamentalism. National states and government have rebounded back

BY JANINE BRODIE

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National states and government have rebounded back into the governing equation in a way that they have not been seen since the pre-Reagan years.

into the governing equation in a way that they have not been seen since the pre-Reagan years.

Despite, or perhaps more accurately because of, these developments, the Obama team has been surprisingly silent about its vision of the future of North American governance. Many commentators have argued that much of Obama's electoral rhetoric about reopening NAFTA was simply that—promises made during the heat of a primary and an election campaign to recruit voters in America's heartland who have seen their jobs and communities disintegrate in the face of corporate outsourcing, government neglect, fraud, corruption, and financial collapse.

These are the dubious legacies of America's experiment with market fundamentalism in this century. In this context, NAFTA occupies a place in the contemporary battered American psyche as a shorthand for the hegemon's ultimate encounter with the new global politi-

cal economy and all that has been lost—certainty, security, and wealth. Reopening NAFTA, as undoubtedly Obama's Ivy League economic team is keenly aware, is down the list of priorities when compared with a traumatized domestic economy, mounting trade deficits, and staggering public debt.

NERVOUS NEIGHBOURS

The mere talk of revisiting NAFTA, however, has been unsettling for Canada and Mexico. Prime Minister Harper expressed his profound opposition to revisiting NAFTA, while posturing that Canada was in a far stronger position than it was 20 years ago to use energy to lever a better deal. The subsequent collapse of oil prices, mounting American concerns about tar sands "dirty oil," and Obama's overriding ambition to make green energy the centrepiece of his economic recovery program obviously weaken Harper's veiled threat and the energy negotiating card.

More desperately, Mexican President Felipe Calderon slipped into Washington, days before the inauguration, for a private meeting with Obama, undoubtedly fearing that any promised changes to NAFTA's environmental and labour side-agreements would further undermine Mexico's slipping position within NAFTA. Displacement by China as the United States' second largest trading partner, an escalating spiral of illegal migration, narco-capitalism, and rampant corruption increasingly threaten to marginalize Mexico in any future continental negotiations. The prevailing wisdom is that these very real problems as well as Mexico's ongoing resistance to demands to privatize its oil reserves render Mexico ineligible to play in the North American big league until these issues are resolved.

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The powerful cabal of corporate and political actors, which have successfully institutionalized myriad forms of deeper continental integration since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, are similarly reticent to return to the NAFTA negotiating table, but for different reasons. The North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), an SPP business advisory body composed of ten top corporate executives from each of the three partner countries, cautioned North America's political leaders at the 2008 SPP New Orleans Summit that if NAFTA itself continues to be a target, any efforts to deepen NAFTA will be largely unsuccessful.

SECURITY TRUMPS TRADE

This cabal has expressed increasing concern about the progress of deep integration since the unveiling of the SPP. Once celebrated as "NAFTA on steroids," the SPP was the product of a political calculation that fused the United States' seeming insatiable hunger for national security after 9/11 with the Canadian corporate vision of a seamless North American market. The SPP represented a trade-off between physical and economic security but, after only three years of implementation, the gamble has backfired: security trumped trade. Both the Martin and Harper governments have dutifully mimicked the security agenda of the US Department of Homeland Security, doling out over \$10 billion to improve border security, acquiescing to various measures to establish a continental security perimeter, and diminishing domestic civil liberties in the process.

None of this has ensured "smart" cross-border flows of supply chains, goods, or people: quite the opposite. Within the past year, such prominent entities as the CCCE, the Fraser Institute, the NACC (North American Competitiveness Council), the C.D. Howe Institute, and the Canadian International Council all have issued reports deriding the SPP as a public-relations disaster.

More specifically, they condemn the SPP's mushrooming security provisions

The Obama administration, however, shows little political appetite or sense of urgency for a new and bold vision of North America.

as a "security tax" on NAFTA trade, which inflates the actual risk of security breaches relative to the mounting costs of doing business on the continent, makes internal borders thicker and stickier, and feeds bureaucratic empire-building and cash grabs. The SPP has rapidly configured a new continental security regime, while paying few economic dividends for the corporate sector, excluding, of course, the growing security sector.

As a result, Canada's corporate elite has regrouped to reframe its deep integration project with a "new big idea" that advances two core strategies. The first is that any new initiative to further integrate North American governance should exclude Mexico. The new mantra, according to the CCCE, is that "three can talk, two can do" or, as the Fraser Institute puts it, "three can talk, two can walk."

ENDING BIG BUSINESS'S PRIVILEGED ACCESS

The second core strategy is to build upon existing SPP processes, including regulatory and security harmonization and the empowerment of private sector actors in the policy process. The CCCE, for example, is currently campaigning for an unparalleled degree of regulatory harmonization, a common external tariff and security perimeter, joint command of land and naval forces, and an enhanced role for the NACC. A 2008 C.D. Howe report recommends the privatization of key border security and customs powers.

It remains an open question whether the new Obama administration will listen to the growing chorus of business leaders and corporate-funded think tanks demanding the acceleration and intensification of continental integration, but

initial signs suggest that the window may be closing for the very idea of a new big idea. President Obama has committed to ongoing participation in the annual meetings of the "three amigos." But he also promises to end big business's privileged access to that forum by drawing labour, environmental, and civil society groups into future discussions about North American governance.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's responses at her Senate confirmation hearing are more telling. Although her testimony underlined the central importance of America's North American partners to the new administration, it did not betray a vision of a singular North American economic space or political community. Rather, she saw critical oil resources to the North, and challenging migration problems and a drug war to the South. It is likely that the SPP-inspired processes of incremental regulatory, security, energy, and infrastructural harmonization between Canada and the United States will proceed under the radar, as it has for the past three years. The Obama administration, however, shows little political appetite or sense of urgency for a new and bold vision of North America.

On this side of the border, some commentators have suggested that Obama's incredible popularity among Canadians might provide a fertile platform for Harper to pursue deeper forms of economic integration with the United States. Maybe, but I would not bet a subprime mortgage on it. It is doubtful whether the deep integration project can be ratcheted up amidst the unprecedented market failures and citizen insecurities arising from the past decade's failed experiment with market fundamentalism and the growing crisis of liberalized global capitalism. 🍀

Mexico: Its democratic transition and narco-terrorism

RISING VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

On September 15, 2008, at the Independence Day celebration in the central plaza of Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, two grenades were thrown into a crowd listening to the governor's speech, resulting in several dead and injured. It was the first time something like this had happened in the country. Several years ago in Sinaloa, unknown gunmen opened fire for no apparent reason on a group of eight girls and boys under the age of 21—three between the ages of 13 and 15—who were riding in several vehicles and waiting for a traffic light to change. More than 300 shell casings from different weapons like G3s, AR-15s, and 9mm pistols were recovered at the scene. And in Culiacán, Sinaloa, a young pregnant nurse and her husband were murdered with rounds from AK-47s and 9mm and 38 Super pistols in full daylight outside a shopping centre (*La Crónica*, July 14, 2008; *Noroeste*, July 19, 2008; *El Universal*, September 16, 2008).

In the case of Morelia, the attackers were linked to drug traffickers, particularly the La Familia cartel. La Familia was previously associated with the Zetas, a paramilitary group created in the 1990s by former elite soldiers known as the GAFES (Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales), which was associated with drug trafficking organizations from the state of Tamaulipas. The victims at Morelia were classified as the targets of terrorist actions. La Familia's leader is a Bible reader who calls himself "The Craziest." In the Sinaloa cases, no specific organization has been pinpointed as responsible for the attacks. In all these cases, civilians were the object of what seems to be violence calculated to create alarm among the populace and to pressure authorities to change their strategies against the traffickers.

BY LUIS ASTORGA

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The Mexican state has been unable to contain and neutralize violent groups, and its intelligence work to prevent and stop their actions has been ineffective.

Michoacán is President Felipe Calderón's home state and the place where he launched his administration's first anti-drug military operation. September 15, 2008, the date of the Morelia attack, has acquired enormous symbolic meaning because it marks the crossing of another line in the ongoing gangland-style competition among cartels to see which one can carry out the most daring, bloody actions. Sinaloa is the home state of most of the country's drug kingpins. There is no evidence to show that there has been an agreement among organizations in these states to attack the defenceless public. But these kinds of actions can and do escalate.

A FAILING STATE

The Mexican state has been unable to contain and neutralize violent groups, and its intelligence work to prevent and stop their actions has been ineffective. The numbers from government sources

and the print media put drug trafficking-related homicides at more than 5,000 in 2008, of which approximately 10 percent were soldiers, police, and security personnel. This represents an almost 100 percent increase compared to 2007, according to the attorney general (BBC World, December 9, 2008).

Drug trafficking-related violence has not been this widespread or this frequent for many decades, ever since the anti-marijuana and anti-poppy laws were passed in the 1920s. The same is true for the number of confrontations between traffickers and law enforcement. At the end of the 1960s, violence began to rise, but it did not yet challenge the state's ability to contain the perpetrators. Nor did the traffickers deliberately defy the state's monopoly on the use of force. The state's party system, created after the Mexican Revolution, built security institutions with extralegal attributes that allowed the state to do two things simultaneously: protect civilians and contain drug trafficking. The illegal drug business would flourish as a subordinate order as long as the authoritarian state lasted.

THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE UNRAVELS

The relationships among Mexico's police, the traffickers, the steady rise in violence, and the growth in the domestic market for illegal drugs began to change as the single-party state system began to unravel. The world market for illegal drugs was growing, as was the traffickers' economic capabilities for corruption. They were able to arm themselves with high-powered, high-calibre weapons, while at the same time, the authoritarian state and its mechanisms for control could no longer check the growth of drug monopolies. All of this was happening against the background of the country's transition toward democracy.

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The issue of security and the challenges that powerful drug trafficking organizations posed were not a priority for the political class in the first years of the transition. The political parties were more interested in the possibilities opening up for them to win more and better positions of power. In the midst of this competition, they failed to build the institutions needed for security and the administration of justice in a new era. There was little consideration that the country might be challenged by powerful drug trafficking cartels. The competition among parties and the end of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) monopoly on the presidency happened without a wide-ranging review of Mexico's security needs. This oversight would later hobble future presidents.

The result of this failure contributed to the fragmentation and growing weakness in the state's security and intelligence services that left it unable to respond to the challenges posed by criminal groups, which went from accommodation with the powers that be to direct confrontation with Mexico's security institutions. Some criminal organizations, in addition to expanding their activities territorially, added another dimension—they set out to establish territorial control over their drug fiefdoms by physically eliminating their rivals and competitors. They also branched out and diversified their incomes by opening up new activities—for example, protection services for legal and illegal businesses, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, and media piracy.

CALDERON'S INHERITANCE OF A POISONED CHALICE

The security and justice institutions that President Calderon inherited from previous administrations made it impossible to be optimistic about his government's capacity not only to contain the drug cartels' onslaught, but also to effectively assert state authority against narco-terrorism. The lack of substantive political progress on Mexico's domestic security

It is unanimously agreed that the high levels of corruption, poor training, and lack of confidence in the country's police forces are difficult problems to solve in the short run.

needs during the Vicente Fox administration, and the difficult, polemical circumstances under which Calderon took office, foreshadowed the continued wars of "positioning" among the drug cartels and their relentless capacity for political confrontation. These two factors more than any others have made it impossible in the short term to reach the agreements needed to reform and strengthen Mexico's security forces and the administration of justice.

In addition, since the Ernesto Zedillo administration, and through the twilight of the PRI state and the one-party system and the beginnings of the transition to democracy, the armed forces increasingly played an important role in the anti-drug strategy. Calderon decided to speed up this trend in the hope of containing the drug traffickers' organizations and armed belligerence; however, the enemy turned out to be more tenacious than expected. The traffickers intensified their internecine slaughter, their attacks against police, soldiers, and government security officials, and against civil society. The massive presence of soldiers and police in several states has not been enough to crush the illegal trade in arms and drugs or the drug traffickers' ability to corrupt Mexico's law enforcement officials. This failure has meant that the drug gang bosses

continue to leave a trail of death and bloody violence that, in turn, are the conditions of domestic ungovernability.

SITUATION CRITICAL

The president's supporters, opponents, and most of civil society have all expressed support for the presence of the military in the streets despite its poor results in curbing violence. No one dares set a date for their return to barracks. However, the army's continued presence increases the probability of further corruption and the growth in clandestine, vigilante, paramilitary groups linked to drug trafficking. If some of the army deserters join the drug traffickers, then Mexico will enter into a new spiral of violence. It is unanimously agreed that the high levels of corruption, poor training, and lack of confidence in the country's police forces are difficult problems to solve in the short run.

Further, nothing inside or outside Mexico compels us to think there will be a radical change in drug policies. For example, no one expects a progressive decriminalization of some substances. Under these conditions, it is not possible to foresee an alternative. The traffickers will continue to escalate the violence—whether of the "traditional" kind or what has been classified as terrorist violence. The tipping point could come when some group or coalition has the clout and support of Mexico's many publics to force the government to act with determination. This too will require a new consensus between Mexico's political class and the majority. Or, it could be something more dramatic, as the democratic state manages to regain the upper hand in the war against the drug gangs. 🍂

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Obama's impossible North American agenda

You might think that, with all the excitement about Barack Obama transforming US and even global politics, the prospects for North America might be looking up. In fact, the North America that NAFTA created exactly 15 years ago is in deep trouble—a trouble that Obama is unlikely to alleviate.

THE NAFTA VISION

With the deepening of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement's restrictions on government and the broadening of the old North America to include Mexico, NAFTA in 1994 was thought to be heralding the birth of a new global region. Almost identical in population and GNP to the then 15-member European Union, NAFTA's tariff elimination, limitations on governmental support for domestic firms, and various novel dispute settlement mechanisms were meant to create a continental marketplace that would increase investment within the region, stimulate growth through exports, and reduce the flow of Mexicans seeking work in the United States.

Indeed, exports did multiply, though in Canada's case, statistical double-counting grossly overstated their value, which was in any case due more to a deeply depreciated dollar than to modestly reduced tariffs. As the dollar recovered, Canadian manufactured exports plummeted, the balance of payments only being saved by increasing world prices for robust resource exports. In the United States, NAFTA's predicted "sucking sound" of job loss to Mexico did not materialize. The US economy was too large to notice its impact.

Mexico did receive proportionately more foreign direct investment, which accelerated growth in its northern states without having much impact on the economy's productivity. A flood of imports had predictable—but not predicted—consequences. Small and medium enterprises were wiped out by the thousands, increasing urban unemployment. Massive imports of Washington-

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[T]he North America that NAFTA created exactly 15 years ago is in deep trouble—a trouble that Obama is unlikely to alleviate.

subsidized corn caused two million campesinos to leave their villages. These two phenomena led to increased, not decreased, emigration pressures, with up to 500,000 Mexicans crossing the border annually to supply the insatiable demand for cheap labour in the US agriculture and service sectors.

President Vicente Fox had expected to cut an immigration deal with his friend George W. Bush, but Mexico's principled resistance in the Security Council to the United Nations authorizing a US attack on Iraq left the question to fester into an angry anti-Mexican backlash. As a result, North America's identity now has less to do with an integrated continental economy than with a physical wall being built along the United States' southern boundary and long wait lines at the Canada-US border, where passports are now required.

15 YEARS LATER

Exactly 15 years after NAFTA's implementation, it is a real question whether North America exists in any meaningful political-economic sense. Having served Washington's strategic interests in negotiating the World Trade Organization

(fears that NAFTA presaged a Fortress America protectionism helped bring the foot-dragging European Union to the table), Washington lost interest in North America as a regional power base. It pursued trade and investment agreements with other countries without consulting its two neighbours, sometimes even undermining their interests. Apart from a brief venture in the steel industry, no international negotiations were based on the three countries hammering out a common position *ex ante*.

With 9/11, the previous absence of a positive US commitment to supporting a new continental solidarity morphed into a distinctly negative distrust based on the fear that terrorists could enter the United States across either its northern or southern border. Security trumped trade even when the much ballyhooed Security and Prosperity Partnership and its big business brother, the North American Competitiveness Council, pushed for loosening security regulations that had increased border transit costs and decreased North American firms' competitiveness.

The North American project is teetering on the point of failure. However wretched their working conditions may be, Mexico's maquiladoras are losing out to China, which has taken over as the chief Third World exporter to the United States. Alberta's tar sands potential has faltered with the collapse of world oil prices and the threat that green legislation pushed by the US Congress will prohibit the US import of such an environmentally dirty fossil fuel.

OBAMA AND THE NORTH AMERICAN AGENDA

With "NAFTA" now a dirty word in American political discourse, the chances of the new president addressing this challenge in his first term are negligible. The decline in crime has created a more favourable climate, as has the decline of rural population, so there is

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little interest in US politics for draconian gun control. During his campaign, Barack Obama made comforting noises to assuage the National Rifle Association, so is unlikely to do anything about the gun-supply issue. If he has a solution that could de-criminalize and regulate the narcotics trade, he's kept it well hidden. His position on building a wall along the Mexican border doesn't differ from Bush's. Nor has he indicated any desire to challenge Washington's security paranoia. Indeed he has reinforced the Bush administration's anti-terrorism rhetoric by promising to dispatch more troops to Afghanistan where they are supposed to fight terrorists.

Diametrically opposed cross-border attitudes are not helping. Americans blame the influx of narcotics, border violence, and illegal immigrants on their neighbours. Quite apart from the NAFTA-exacerbated economic disparities between the United States and Mexico, Canadians and Mexicans find the root causes of these problems in an ever-growing US consumer market for narcotics and largely uncontrolled sales of US small arms to drug traffickers. This made Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's public acknowledgment that US consumers demand narcotics and the US manufactures and supplies small arms to the drug cartels a heartening omen for Mexico. An equally important and disheartening omen was Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano's insistence that the US-Canada border must be treated in the same way as the US-Mexico border.

Not only has President Obama shown no interest in fixing what is patently wrong in North America. He has offered no positive vision for its future, perhaps because there is not much interest among key US economic actors in furthering North American integration. When he did mention North America, it was about the futile proposal to renegotiate NAFTA in a way that would have further hobbled Mexico.

What is needed is a generous continental solidarity program designed to do

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for Mexico what Brussels did for Portugal or what the Marshall Plan did for war-ravaged Europe—a Montezuma Plan to help Mexico build an effective and transparent welfare state, pull its economy up toward US and Canadian levels of prosperity, and construct a modern physical infrastructure.

In its own long-term interests, Canada should have proposed such a big-picture plan and started to implement it on its own, but neither Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, or Stephen Harper have gone beyond mouthing platitudes about Latin America.

A BILATERAL FUTURE

Urged on by its business elite, Ottawa is quietly backpedalling on trilateralism and trying to distance itself from North American approaches in a nostalgic effort to reactivate the old "special relationship" with Washington. It hopes not to get sucked into the high tensions surrounding such "Mexican" issues as illegal immigration and the narcotics-cartel violence that is escalating in Mexico. Ottawa is telling Uncle Sam that his Canadian border problems are radically different from his Mexican ones and that he needs to deal one-on-one with his neighbour, the nascent energy superpower. Unfortunately, this will require a sea change at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which sees the terrorist threat as significant from the north as from the south. DHS also knows that Canada and Mexico together are the chief US supply routes of all the main natural and chemical narcotics.

The Canadian economy is so deeply integrated with the American that whatever good comes out of Obama's rescue


package will be good for Canada—at all levels, from the material (exports aka jobs) to the psychological (confidence about the present and optimism about the future). General happiness in Canada about Obama will help push Harper and Flaherty to act against their extremely conservative instincts and sing a Keynesian duet.

There are other global issues where Harper's conservatism will come up against Obama's liberalism. Harper has been as regressive as Bush on climate change, and so will be under heavy pressure to go green both in his environmental policies and in supporting the post-Bali negotiations of Kyoto II.

OIL SANDS: CANADA'S ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD

This is also a domestic issue since, as an Albertan, Harper is a strong defender of his province's environmentally destructive tar sands interests. Extracting oil from these sands consumes huge volumes of water and natural gas while belching greenhouse gases. If Washington goes green, Canada's oil economy will turn blue unless it develops new technologies and new strategies.

So there is little reason to expect much progress among the three countries, though Can-Am relations should be little different than they are now.

Those looking for a revival of North America will have to wait for a second Obama term, trusting it may prove more conducive to continental construction and praying that, four years from now, it will not be too late. 

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Canada, the United States, and the change we can believe in*

A LANDMARK ELECTION ABOUT CHANGE

The 2008 United States presidential election was all about change. In one of the most impressive political campaigns in modern history, a young, confident, well-spoken senator from Illinois asked the American people to “stand for change,” to support “the change that we need,” and to say “yes we can” to change. Senator Obama rarely if ever went off message, and that message was as clear as it was consistent. His defining campaign slogan, “change we can believe in,” sounded a clarion call to the faithful, the disheartened, the disaffected, and even the disenfranchised. And, in the end, it carried Senator Obama all the way to the White House.

The presidential election of 2008 will not soon be forgotten. It was the first campaign ever to take place between two sitting senators, the first time in more than 50 years that neither a sitting president nor a former vice-president was in the race, and only the second time that a female candidate was on the ticket for either of the major parties. In the end, with a record number of voters turning out to give Senator Obama a decisive victory, America would have its change. At the most basic level, the change was very impressive. The election resulted in the first African-American president, the first catholic vice-president, and a clear majority in both houses, with the Democrats picking up eight Senate seats and 21 seats in Congress.

REVOLUTIONIZING CAMPAIGNING

No less impressive, or important, but perhaps less obvious, the 2008 election witnessed some very important changes in the process, most notably in terms of

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how campaigns are run and how potential voters are courted. The Obama campaign raised an astounding \$660 million in private donations, the Clinton campaign another \$250 million, and the McCain campaign an amount just shy of \$240 million. In total, we are looking at well over a billion dollars in private donations. These unprecedented numbers will very likely change the entire dynamic

of campaigns and campaigning at this level. By harnessing the power of the Internet, along with its potential for social and political networking, and by creating a broadly based populist movement, which mobilized people, money, and support directly through the Internet, the Obama campaign broke new and important ground with respect to how to engage people and mobilize voters.

What may be even more impressive is that the Obama campaign revolutionized electoral politics by raising the bulk of this money through small donor contributions. Of the \$660 million, \$580 million came directly from individuals and nearly \$250 million was raised from contributions that were under \$200. Moreover, although the strategy to fund the primaries through private donations was well established, no major party has refused to take government funds for the general election since the system was established in 1976—until Obama did so in 2008.

FINANCIAL CRISIS

What changed, and did so quite dramatically, was the role that economic issues played in the campaign. The turning point in the 2008 election can be traced to the first few weeks of September. In relatively short order, and in stunned silence, the world watched as some of America's largest and presumably most secure financial institutions collapsed. This was followed by a startling decline in the value of equities, and, without much delay, in a global financial crisis of historic proportions. Literally overnight, the financial crisis and, more generally, the deteriorating state of the economy, came to preoccupy voters and dominate the election. Economic reform quickly became the dominant issue.

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By the time that President Obama gave his inaugural address, he had little choice but to explicitly recognize the extent of the economic crisis and use this speech (though much less sombre than his campaign speeches) as another call to arms.

Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many. . . . For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act—not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age.

What all of this points to, at least from a Canadian perspective, is the biggest change that we have seen in more than a generation. For more than 20 years, there has been something of a disconnect in North America. Indeed, when we talk about the trilateral North American relationship, we are really talking about three separate bilateral relationships. More specifically, there was a disconnect with respect to priorities. In Washington, for the longest time, and well before September 11, 2001, the Canada-US relationship was defined by border issues and by security concerns. For Canada, that same relationship was about economics in general, about trade in particular, and, even more specifically, about access. For Mexico, at the risk of

Regulation is due for a revival, and government will once again play a somewhat greater role in the economy.


oversimplifying a complex relationship, the movement of people was the key issue.

On the economic front, we have seen more than 20 years of financial deregulation (beginning, at least, with the 1987 appointment of Alan Greenspan) and more than 20 years of freer (though sometimes unenthusiastically so) trade. All of this has been supported in the United States by a strong economy, a relatively firm commitment to the market, and an equally strong commitment to smaller government. Moreover, should one attempt to challenge the logic identified above, it was made clear that “security trumps economics.”

THE GREAT RE-REREGULATION U-TURN

This, quite simply, is no longer the high standard of public policy, as the following quotation (again from the inaugural address) suggests. Regulation is due for a revival, and government will once again play a somewhat greater role in the economy.

What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them—that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply. The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works. . . . Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill. Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control—and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous.

In the end, the question for those of us who study Canada-US relations, and who have watched this extraordinary election, amidst these even more astonishing times, is how we can play an effective and appropriate role in righting the North American economy and securing our economic future. 

** This article is based on a piece that the author wrote for an upcoming issue of International Journal.*

For more information on *Canada Watch* and the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, visit www.yorku.ca/robarts.

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The future of US democracy

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The democracy in the United States is the oldest of the modern democracies and an essential model for the different democratic efforts in Latin America and many other countries. Although the US democracy has faced different challenges and difficult times, all have been fundamentally overcome. It can be said that the most recent challenge was the administration of George W. Bush (2001–2009). Barack Obama's election marks the opportunity to recover lost ground. This is for several reasons.

THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE 2000 ELECTION

First, there are well-founded doubts about the authenticity of Bush's victory in the 2000 presidential election. The problem was not, as many suppose, that his opponent, Al Gore, had won the popular vote by about half a million ballots, while Bush had an official four-electoral-vote advantage out of the total of 538. This eventuality is built into the US electoral system and by no means lessens the victor's legitimacy. The problem lay, rather, in the fact that Bush obtained the 25 electoral votes from the key state of Florida, governed by his brother Jeb, in very tenuous circumstances. The first count gave Gore a 229-vote advantage, but absentee ballots gave Bush a slim advantage of a little over 1,700 votes. The count of these votes was clearly biased in favour of the Republicans, at a rate of three to one.

The Gore team applied for new recounts to the Florida Supreme Court, which ordered a review of a large part of the dubious ballots. Before concluding this recount, the US Supreme Court, with a majority of Republican judges, ordered that it be halted to hear the arguments of both parties. Its final decision validated the Democrats' arguments by stipulating that all the votes in question should be recounted, but also added that the recount could not continue because the

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[T]he only things that will be able to put a brake on the abuse of power internationally are the internal mechanisms of democracy themselves, of checks and balances, of accountability.

time limit for the recount was up (a time limit that the court itself had eliminated by its stay). At that point, Bush had only a 158-vote advantage. Later recounts done by several media organizations showed that, if a full recount had been carried out, Gore would have beaten Bush, although also by a very small margin.

In addition, it would also come out that Florida's secretary of state, Republican Katherine Harris, had ordered the names of at least 20,000 Democratic voters struck from voter registration rolls. This authentic case of fraud evidenced to the world the weaknesses of the US electoral system and called into question the judiciary's impartiality. All this put a president in the White House without a clear mandate from the citizenry: 40 percent of the public did not believe Bush's victory was valid.

Although during the 2008 elections both parties made accusations of fraud, Obama's easy win makes it possible to

be certain about what the majority of the electorate wanted and for the outcome to be fully respected. This result will allow for a recovery of confidence in the US electoral system.

THE WAR IN IRAQ

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Bush declared war not only on Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was hiding, but also on Iraq, without United Nations sanction. He used arguments that turned out to be false, such as the alleged links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, or the existence of weapons of mass destruction. That is, he flagrantly deceived the public and the Congress of the United States, embarking on a war that has been extremely expensive in human terms, as well as diplomatically and economically. More than 5,000 US soldiers have lost their lives in this reckless adventure; the United States has projected the image of being arbitrary and disrespectful of the international order and international law; and more than US\$700 billion has been spent. The demands of the war against terrorism in general, and in Iraq in particular, have limited some democratic spaces and freedoms domestically in the United States, both with regard to individuals' privacy (with the introduction of the *Patriot Act*) and with regard to freedom of expression.

Senator Obama did not back the invasion of Iraq, in contrast to many of his Democratic Party colleagues. He made that very clear during the Democratic primaries when he was running against Hillary Clinton, who did vote in favour of war. Obama's opponent in the presidential elections, the Vietnam veteran John McCain, offered to prolong US military presence in Iraq 100 years if necessary in order to win. By then, however, the public was no longer clear on how rational that strategy was, or exactly what it would mean to "win." Obama promised,

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by contrast, to implement measures to begin a gradual withdrawal from Iraq, without considering this a defeat, but rather an essentially rational, pragmatic decision given the mistake that the invasion had been in the first place.


ACCOUNTABILITY

Although US democracy will be able to recover certain ground with the new president in office, the strength of the mechanism of accountability, a crucial element in a democracy, will continue to be put to the test. Fundamental in any democratic country, accountability becomes particularly important in a military power like the United States. If these powers can ignore international norms and limits to, for example, invade another country without foundation (as clearly occurred in the case of Iraq), the only things that will be able to put a brake on the abuse of power internationally are the internal mechanisms of democracy

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themselves, of checks and balances, of accountability.

At the international level, there is no country or international body capable of bringing to the carpet abusive rulers of these powers—for example, the United States has excused itself from complying with the international regime of respect for human rights. The political cost domestically can be electoral, as happened in Spain, when the ruling Popular Party lost power, and in the United States itself, with the Republican Party losing

the presidency. Even though in 2004 Bush was re-elected, the legitimacy of his victory was questioned in the swing state of Ohio. But a democracy should also have the ability to call anyone to account—anyone who has used his or her power to hide or invent official information, deceiving both the citizenry and the Congress, to justify an essentially arbitrary act, like the invasion of Iraq, which has been detrimental even to the invading country itself. This is where the weakest link in US democracy can be detected. 

The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies Mandate

The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies supports interdisciplinary and discipline-specific research pertinent to the study of Canada and “Canada in the World.” In practice, this has meant an orientation toward broader Canadian and international scholarly and policy-making communities, inquiries into comparative perspectives on the Canadian mosaic, and assistance to York scholars in working with their counterparts in other countries.

Faculty at the Robarts Centre, including the Director, the Robarts Chair, and other Robarts researchers, regularly teach courses and contribute to curriculum development in areas pertaining to Canadian, North American, and comparative studies. The Robarts Centre also provides supervised research and writing opportunities for graduate students from a wide range of York graduate programs.

The Robarts Centre offers a strong program of high-level seminars, workshops, and conferences on major issues, focusing on Canadian perspectives on Communications, Culture, the Fine Arts, History, Political Economy, Public Policy, and International Relations. Participants include York faculty and students, Canadian and international scholars, and the larger community of Metropolitan Toronto.

Current, ongoing work at the Centre includes research initiatives on the public domains and international standards, Canadian cinema, and issues pertaining to media perspectives on Canada. The Centre acts as a research arm for the Joint Program in Communication and Culture and its work on the Canadian Internet Project. The Centre also housed the Toronto offices of the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History Tom Thomson project. ■

MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

**Conference Organized by The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies
with the support of the
York University 50th Anniversary Committee
September 24–25, 2009**

Senate Chamber, Glendon Campus
(2275 Bayview Avenue)

Conference Chairs:

Daniel Drache, Associate Director, Robarts Centre
Seth Feldman, Director, Robarts Centre

Multiculturalism, once the crumb thrown to those not born into one of the “founding peoples,” has evolved into a cornerstone of what it means to be Canadian. It is assumed to be held together by a curiosity about the other and an exposure to many different ways of living and knowing. There is much research challenging this assumption and many immigrant communities question the policy’s shortcomings. Today, multiculturalism hangs in the balance.

To address these changes and their future implications, “Multiculturalism and Its Discontents” is designed as a public event featuring a wide selection of Canada’s best-known social commentators, journalists, pollsters, and scholars. In a set of lively, open discussions, they will address multiculturalism’s legal and social limitations, its flashpoints, its successes and failures, as well as the unprecedented creativity of the many diasporas housed in Canada.

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Updated March 2009

Check out this cutting-edge remixed documentary produced by Jaigris Hodson in conjunction with the Toronto Public Culture Working group, entitled **Mashup A Documentary Remix Made Possible by Open Source Cinema**. Watch Part II here.

Canada Watch Spring 2009 Obama Goes to Washington: The Impossible North American Agenda

Daniel Drache's new Book **-Defiant Publics: The Unprecedented Reach of the Global Citizen**. See the feature article.

Canada Watch Special Edition - Deep Integration : North America Post-Bush. Co-edited by Daniel Drache and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde

North America at the Crossroads. Edited by Daniel Drache.

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