

Notes

for a Presentation by

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Why a Democratic Party Win Is Important for the World— And for Canada

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Check Against Delivery

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Introduction

This morning I am going to talk about the United States in the world, in pretty broad-brush terms, specifically, I will try to give a Canadian perspective on what we can expect of US foreign policy under a new Democratic or Republican administration. Most people, including me, think that either will be an improvement on the incumbent.

Others may disagree, and only time will tell who was right, but on balance, my own judgment is that it is better for the world, including the United States, and including Canada, that Senator Obama be elected the 44th President of the US rather than Senator McCain, problems endure but individuals make a difference.

In my opinion, Obama is the individual best suited to our times.

Why?

Rationale

- Because the world wants a clear signal of change from the United States, a clean break with the Bush years.
- It is manifestly in the United States' interest, as well as in Canada's interest, that that signal be given.
- With some exceptions, Senator Obama embodies change, while on some of the major international challenges the US and the world face, Senator McCain represents continuity with some discredited past policies.

At the same time, it is entirely possible, even inevitable, that the world is investing too heavily in Senator Obama and daring to hope too much in him. Senator Obama's biggest problem will be meeting exaggerated expectations.

The US as the Pivot of a Multi-Power World

In any case, the US will remain the pivot of the international system, even if the world will be increasingly multi-power in its make-up. I do not see a decline in American presence in the world. (I was not part of the decline school in the Eighties and I am not part of it now.)

American culture will remain pervasive. American science, especially medical science, will lead the world. American universities will continue to set the international standard for excellence. The American economy will, likely, continue to generate unprecedented wealth for its people, and for its trading partners, although it will at some point have to resolve its own triple deficits—budget, current account and trade.

The US military will remain without peer in terms of sheer hard power, although American soft power, so foolishly squandered by the current administration, will take a long time to restore.

The United States will, by most definitions, remain the most powerful state on the planet, and its constructive, cooperative engagement in the world will remain pivotal to peace and prosperity. But American dominance will diminish as other powers rise.

The Asians, according to my former Singaporean colleague at the UN, Kishore Mahbubani, have long been regarded as just consumers of world history, reacting tactically and, with the obvious exception of Japan, defensively to the surges of Western commerce, power and thought. But, now the Asians are again producing history as they did for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West.

Consider this quote from Mr. Mahbubani's new book:

“They called it the Industrial Revolution because, for the first time in all of human history, standards of living rose at a rate where there were noticeable changes within a human life span – changes of perhaps 50 percent. At current growth rates in Asia standards of living may rise 100 fold or 10,000 percent within a human life span.”

And Asia is not the whole story, of course. The European Union, with a combined GDP of almost \$17 trillion, remains capable of making enormously constructive contributions to world affairs, including military contributions when it wants to. The EU, also, accounts for \$256 billion of military spending, cumulatively second only to the US. It is cumulatively, also, the largest aid donor, providing 75% of the total aid transferred to poorer countries (Source: OECD).

Russia is back under now Prime Minister Putin, thanks to rampaging commodity prices, especially oil, and its own blend of democratic autocracy that delivers legitimacy through rising standards of living. Russia's economy ranks 10th in the world, just behind Canada's. Russia's military, with in excess of 14,000 nuclear warheads, remains the second most powerful in the world. Russia has made it very clear that it intends neither to be taken for granted nor dominated.

Latin America, long a continent apart in political terms, is demanding and getting a decisive place at the top tables, such as the Doha (trade) Round, the Bali Climate Change process, and, increasingly, the UN Security Council. Brazil is now routinely invited to G8 meetings

Those problems look very different to different people.

What Is Important to Whom?

For example, security.

For Americans, after 9/11 the major priority has been terrorism. The National Counterterrorism Center reported to the US Congress in 2006, that there were a total of 14,338 terrorist attacks around the world, resulting in 20,498 deaths, the lion's share in Iraq.

But for others, especially people in the world's poorer countries, danger looks very different.

- With the earthquake in China and the typhoon in Burma, natural disasters will have killed in excess of 100,000 people this year.
- Pregnancy-related complications killed more than 535,000 women last year, 99% of them in the Third World. (Source: WHO Report, http://www.icrw.org/docs/Maternal_Mortality_2005.pdf)
- Malaria killed one million people last year, mostly in the poorest countries, (Source: Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, World Malaria Report 2005, www.cdc.gov/malaria); and,

- HIV-AIDS killed over two million people in 2005, again overwhelmingly in the Third World. (Source:UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update, November 2007)

Where you stand on security depends obviously on where you live.

Beware the Mercator Delusion that North America is the centre of the universe.

We have a monopoly neither on the problems nor on the solutions, and what preoccupies us might not preoccupy others.

In any event, from international commerce to finance to nuclear proliferation to terrorism to energy security and climate change; to pandemic disease, solutions to intractable global challenges are impossible without the willing engagement of all new-old powers, and many others, as well.

In these circumstances, effective diplomacy will only become more important.

Why Change Is Important

Change is important because the last eight years of US policy have been almost unrelentingly damaging to the fabric of the international system that the US itself had knit damaging to US standing in the world and damaging to Canada's interest in a rules based approach to global governance.

The world wants and needs an administration in Washington that it respects.

The world wants and needs American cooperative leadership, if intractable global problems are to be tackled and resolved.

The world does not need or want an American dominion, a distinction that was lost on American neo-cons.

The world needs the US to go back to the future, to the cooperative leadership that brought so much success for the US and everyone else.

Those successes have been transformative and are worth explicitly recalling if only as an antidote to the hostility the Bush government has generated towards itself, and the US.

- American diplomacy conceived the idea of collective security following the collapse of the 19th Century's balance of power
- American military and economic power turned the tide in World War II
- American diplomacy conceived and promoted the idea of the United Nations and built much of the treaty-based system of international law.
- American diplomacy produced the institutions of collective security, including NATO, and brought into being the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, now the World Trade Organization.
- The American Marshall Plan put Europe back on its feet and Germany and Japan on the road to democratic governance.
- American deterrence and US-led containment brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union and the defeat of communism. Perhaps the signal security achievements of the second half of the 20th century.
- The combination of American military power and diplomatic acuity have preserved peace and stability for 60 years in North-East Asia, the intersection of Russia, China Japan, the Koreas and Taiwan, perhaps the most dangerous region on the planet.

Against that record, the balance sheet for the last eight years makes for grim reading.

The catastrophe of the Iraq war, launched in contravention of the UN Charter resulting in the deaths and maiming of scores of thousands of Iraqis, as well as thousands of Americans.

The eternal "War on Terror", which has produced the horrors of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram, the illegal "renditions" of

citizens of third countries to be tortured in Syria and elsewhere and eroded civil liberties in the US and, arguably, also in Canada

The unilateral reinterpretation of international law, including the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions.

The abrogation of international treaties, including arms control treaties, and Kyoto.

The neglect of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, until it had metastasized throughout the region.

The notions of empire that infused neo-con thinking.

The loss of focus on Afghanistan.

The economic policies that have created triple deficits—trade, current account and budgetary—and destabilized the international economic system.

Two prominent American academics, Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, have defined “anti-Americanism” as “a psychological tendency to hold negative views of the United States and of American society in general”.

It does not follow that holding a negative view of the catastrophic Bush balance sheet is either anti-American or psycho.

In any event, that is the view the world holds of the US government and, following the 2004 election, increasingly of the American people themselves, for re-electing President Bush.

According to findings of the Pew Global Attitudes project, conducted since 2002, the image of the United States has declined in most parts of the world.

Favorable ratings of the US are lower in 26 of 33 countries for which trends are available, since 2002.

The U.S. image remains abysmal in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia, countries whose support is vital in countering international terrorism.

Support for the US is in single digits in Turkey (9%) and 15% in Pakistan. 65 % of the people in NATO ally Turkey worry that the US could be a military threat to them.

The American public has, also, become disillusioned.

For the first time since Pew began asking this question in 2004, a majority of Americans now sees the loss of international respect for the United States as a major problem. The percentage of Americans saying the loss of international respect is a major problem has risen from 43% in 2005 to 48% in 2006 and 56% currently.

The Iraq war has ushered in a rise in isolationist sentiment in the US comparable to that of the mid-1970s following the Vietnam war.

Pew surveys have found as many as four-in-ten Americans saying the United States "should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own."

Still, after years of becoming progressively more negative, international views of the United States have begun to improve, according to a BBC World Service Poll earlier this year.

While views of US influence in the world are still predominantly negative, in 11 of the 23 countries the BBC polled they have improved, while worsening in just three countries.

The average percentage saying that the US is having a positive influence has increased from 31 per cent a year ago to 35 per cent today while the view that it is having a negative influence has declined from 52 per cent to 47 per cent.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, who conducted the poll, attributed the improvement to a "hope that a new administration will move away from the foreign policies that have been so unpopular in the world."

Obama Versus McCain

If most of the world wants a clear break from the Bush years, and if many Americans do, too, and if a more cooperative approach to global issues is likely to be the only successful strategy for all concerned, who would make the best President?

Opinions will differ, and both candidates have their strong points, but I favour Obama at this stage. Because he was born of a Kenyan father and a globe-trotting mother, because he spent childhood years in Indonesia, even because part of his US upbringing was in offshore Hawaii, Senator Obama is arguably the most cosmopolitan candidate ever to run for the US Presidency.

His foreign policy would, as a consequence, likely be more worldly and collaborative, with more emphasis on diplomacy, than Senator McCain's would have.

Senator McCain's formative experiences notably in the US Navy and in Vietnam have been very different. His is essentially a military view of the world.

Senator Obama would likely be able to draw on the residuals of US "Soft Power" better than Senator McCain could.

According to Joe Nye, former US Secretary of Defense who coined the term, "Soft Power" is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion.

It derives from the appeal to others of a country's culture, economy and political ideals, as well as the legitimacy of its policies.

Senator Obama would more likely be able to persuade the world to see the US again as a Paragon to emulate. In any case, Senator Obama has talked of his belief that the US can still inspire others to assert their freedoms, and can use international forums and agreements to set standards for others to follow.

In Obama's 2006 book, "The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream", he wrote: "It's time we acknowledge that a defense budget and force structure built principally around the prospect of World War III makes little strategic sense."

Senator McCain, who sees national security as his strong suit, is a very strong proponent of the hard power dimension of foreign policy.

To most of the world, that looks like more of the same.

The candidates' differences are most stark on Iraq.

On Iraq, Senator Obama said in 2002, in the Illinois state legislature:

"I know that invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East and encourage the worst rather than best impulses in the Arab world and strengthen the recruitment arm of al Qaeda."

Prescient, especially coming from a mere state senator at the time.

Senator Obama does not see a military solution to the Middle East and would engage the parties inside Iraq as well as Iraq's neighbours in the attempt to develop a solution. He would "responsibly" remove US troops from Iraq to compel the Iraqis to rise above their sectarian ambitions.

Senator McCain supported the war, continues to believe it was the right decision, thinks current American policy is working and argues that premature withdrawal would amount to surrender, with untold consequences.

Whether McCain or Obama wins, President Bush will be replaced by someone at least rhetorically more open to working with others, including through the UN.

The Democrats, the party of Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy, have traditionally seen more value in multilateral cooperation, and the UN, and that is likely to remain the case.

Senator Obama, has called for the US "to rededicate itself to the [UN] organization and its mission". He has, at the same time, been quite specific in his criticism of the UN's management practices, of the Human Rights Council's disproportionate concentration on Israel, and of the Security Council's ineffectiveness on Darfur and Zimbabwe.

Senator McCain manifests less enthusiasm for the UN than Senator Obama, but seems more pragmatic about it than his more ideological political base is. He certainly does not see the UN as more than one instrument among many of US foreign policy. But, he does see that the UN has its uses.

He wants tougher Security Council sanctions on Iran and would remind Khartoum that the ICC has jurisdiction to prosecute crimes in Darfur, not positions many US conservatives would embrace.

Senator McCain, also, foresees the creation of a League of Democracies, which would act where the UN failed to do so, an initiative he maintains would be compatible with the UN.

As the Iraq war experience made clear, however, democracy does not guarantee either coherence of assessments nor commonality of interests and values.

In any event, Senator McCain has been clear in his intention to work with others, including the UN, and to rebuild alliances. He has said that:

“When we believe international action...is necessary, we must work to persuade our friends and allies that we are right. And we must also be willing to be persuaded by them. To be a good leader, America must be a good ally.”

These are very welcome words and an improvement over President Bush’s attitude, although even the emphasis on friends and allies conveys the “us against them” quality of McCain’s world view.

Senator McCain’s preoccupation with “Islamic Fascism” risks deepening the cleavages between the US and the Muslim world and worsening the atmosphere at the UN in the process.

Polls suggest that Senator Obama has been assumed by many Muslims simply to be less hostile to their interests than current US management.

On Iran, neither Senator Obama nor Senator McCain have taken the military option off the table, and both would put the emphasis on tough-minded diplomacy to prevent a worst-case scenario of Iran’s coercing its neighbours, encouraging terrorists and triggering the unraveling of the Nuclear Non- proliferation Treaty as other countries have recourse to nuclear weapons programs in self-defence.

Senator Obama would engage direct with Iran, as the US did with the Soviets at the height of the Cold War.

Senator McCain, calling an Iranian nuclear weapon program “a danger we cannot allow” would avoid direct contact and would go further on sanctions, including through the UN Security Council.

On the Arab-Israeli issue, both candidates have been at pains to stress their unconditional support for Israel, most recently at the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee’s policy conference in Washington.

Senator Obama supported there the idea of a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, going further than current US policy.

Both candidates would go much further on climate change than the current US administration and much further than the current Canadian government would.

On trade, the Democrats have, at least in recent decades, been more frankly protectionist than the Republicans, and they seem likely to remain so, as the primaries made clear again.

Still, after 9/11, Republican security policies have thickened the border, with considerable protectionist effect, and with very deleterious implications for US or third party investment in Canada.

Nor has the Republican Administration been especially effective in acquitting US obligations under NAFTA, especially on softwood lumber, even when the Republicans controlled the Congress.

Senator Obama can be expected to remember the deliberately leaked report from our Consulate in Chicago, a leak that apparently cost him serious support in the Pennsylvania and subsequent primaries and could carry over into the general election,

Senator McCain’s unprecedented choice of Ottawa as the locale of his free trade speech is unlikely to help erase the incident from senator Obama’s mind.

Underlying Limiting Factors

Beyond the individual and party positions taken in campaign mode, which might or might not be carried into practice by whoever gains

the Oval Office, there are some deeper influences that shape US thinking on both sides of the political divide and the cultural wars in the US—particularly exceptionalism, religion and militarism.

As a consequence of the leadership role that the US has assumed and that most others have readily conceded and even welcomed, and because of the considerable costs and risks of such leadership, both sides of the political aisle in Washington have come increasingly to regard the US as bearing a disproportionate burden and, partly as a consequence, as meriting exceptional dispensations from international law and norms of behaviour.

This sense of entitlement to exceptional treatment is a contemporary twist on a powerful sentiment in the collective American psyche, America as a new and better world. Exceptionalism has, also, been imbued with a religious quality, at least by Presidents subsequent to the secular Thomas Jefferson.

President Lincoln spoke of “an almost chosen people”. President Franklin Roosevelt spoke of America’s “divine heritage”. President Reagan saw the world in Manichaeian terms, calling the Soviet Union the Evil Empire. President George W. Bush has said that “the advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country.”

The growth of exceptionalism and of religion in US foreign policy has been paralleled in recent years by a process of militarization.

The US military has recovered from the nadir of Vietnam.

Now politicians of every hue literally and figuratively feel they have to salute the military. There are serious foreign policy consequences to this reversal of fortune.

To paraphrase Stompin’ Tom Connors, I think, “when your favourite tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.”

Senator McCain has said he would increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps, as has Senator Obama. The enhanced standing of the US military and the scale of its resources, the presumption of America’s exceptional place in the world, and the influence of religious impulses in US foreign policy, have all coloured American attitudes towards the world, including the UN, in recent years and are

likely to limit the latitude of any presidential candidate to depart dramatically from what has become the norm.

Senator Obama, by virtue of his cosmopolitan persona, and as the personification of change, probably has more latitude on these issues than Senator McCain has.

Conclusion: What It Means for Canada

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

Get our bilateral trade policy right and everything else will take care of itself.

If that is our mindset, Senator McCain is the right candidate for Canadians to support.

He is admirably knowledgeable about Canada, probably more so than most other candidates from either party, ever, and respectful of our contributions to American well-being.

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

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

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

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

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

The Congress of Vienna and balance of power politics kept the peace in Europe, with some serious exceptions, notably between the Germans and the French, for nearly a century.

But when the balance definitively collapsed in 1914, the ensuing world wars killed sixty million people, a catastrophe that continues to haunt our decision-making today.

But, a multi-power, if not a multi-polar, world is emerging again in our own time. Only this time, the potential protagonists are armed with nuclear weapons and are incomparably more powerful than their 19th and 20th Century counterparts.

In a world of nuclear powers, cosmopolitan diplomacy is likely to be more availing than gun-boat diplomacy.

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

Further, the US and Canada, both, have a major interest in profiting from American predominance while it lasts, to cultivate a culture of respect for international law.

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

That kind of leadership seems more likely to be accepted coming from someone who represents a break with the very unpopular, America first, unilateral policies of the current administration.

The cosmopolitan Obama would likely be that break

Under Bush, the US has become Paragon lost. The world, including Canada, needs the Paragon restored.

Senator Obama has the better chance of resurrecting American standing in the world and restoring enlightened US leadership to the conduct of international relations.

And that is in everyone's interest.