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The Incoming Trump Administration

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The election of President Trump provoked considerable disarray. His pre-election warning that states not meeting NATO defence spending targets might be denied US protection has resulted in a member of the Bundestag's Committee of Foreign Affairs arguing for a non-US nuclear deterrent. Lithuania's Foreign Minister warned of a Russian provocation against the Baltic states timed to occur prior to the President-elect taking office. Trump's parallel calls for greater Korean and Japanese military contributions, including his readiness to accept their nuclear self-arming, had the Tokyo-based Diplomat predicting region-wide mayhem ranging from the greater potential for climate-based conflict to the increased probability of China opening hostilities with Taiwan. That at least one election declaration – a commitment to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership – may have stemmed from an astonishing lack of understanding was also of concern: in debate with US Senator Paul Ryan, the President-elect seemed to be criticizing the TPP in part because he thought China was included. Closer to home, Trump's threat to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement provoked calls within Canada to counter this by increasing its own defence spending to the 2% of GDP NATO target and scrapping supply management.

Many of these initial Trump views and commitments go directly against long-standing US, and more importantly, US Republican strategies. Within days of the election, his senior advisors downplayed his remarks about potentially withdrawing US forces from Japan or encouraging nuclear arming. They insisted that the President-elect remains committed to the US alliance with Japan and that he would be open to strengthening it to address common threats like North Korea." After calling NATO obsolete, Trump has since announced a readiness to "work closely" with it and to negotiate more realistic burden sharing. On the other hand, Newt Gingrich, a senior advisor to the President-elect who is also reportedly now being considered for a position in the new administration, had joined Trump in suggesting that he too would think a great deal about whether he would defend NATO ally Estonia from a Russian attack. In part this policymaking to-and-fro reflects the traditional chaos attending any new US administration with multiple voices announcing what they believe to be the new administration's policies. The churn at the moment is no doubt further heightened by the mid-transition purge of Chris Christie supporters from the President-elect's team.

To govern, each administration must also replace over 4100 senior government executives with its political appointees. In the Department of Defense alone, there are 600 of these positions, with over 45 requiring Senate approval. Given the tension between Trump and the mainstream Republican Party leadership, and especially so over his security and trade views, there is an expectation that the party will be exerting a significant moderating influence. For example, it seems the more extreme Trump choices for Secretary of State – Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton – were withdrawn under pressure from Senate Republicans threatening not to confirm them. On the other hand, US engagement with the TPP is forecast to end on Trump's first day in office. Overall one should expect traditional Republican views on international issues to dominate as often as those of President Trump.

Moreover, immediate events, such as Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's unscheduled visit with the President-elect, also seem to be exerting a moderating effect. There were reportedly no suggestions then for Japan to take up nuclear weapons and the visit passed with a Trump advisor noting "Frankly, the prime minister has been more assertive and forthright in trying to make those changes to Japan's global posture." One might also hope that the NATO Summit that Trump has called for would produce like moderation.

Concerns in Canada center on Trump's desire to significantly renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement and that NATO allies like Canada raise their defence spending levels to 2% of GDP. The Economist recently suggested the Republican Party will attempt to limit changes to NAFTA although it expects the administration will "pick a few fights" with nations it perceives are cheating. Canadian suggestions that we are partially sheltered from dramatic US action as a result of the interdependence of our two economies are, I think, optimistic in view of our immediate post 9/11 experience. The \$260 billion in Canadian exports to the United States then dropped between 18% and 23% annually throughout 2002 to 2004 as the US tightened border controls. The US was more than ready to subordinate trade to other policy priorities. It is also too early to forecast the extent to which a Trump administration will demand greater Canadian defence spending, but it would be profoundly unhelpful if our continued defence free riding was linked to NAFTA.

In this regard, it is reported that the Trump transition team is now preparing action lists for its first 100 days then its next 200 days in office. Based on the unpredictability of the potential final policy choices, it would seem wise to bide one's time till these policies emerge and not attract negative attention. Initially, the Trudeau government handled this with skill. While some European governments chose to indirectly comment on Trump's values during the election, Canada remained silent. When he was elected, Canada offered quick congratulations and an invitation to Canada while stressing those goals it shared – such as a focus on growing the middle class. Wisely, it did not crow about its ability to influence or restrain the new administration, as a leaked memo from the UK ambassador in Washington did.

However, since then Canada's response has been incoherent, seemingly impulsive, and by no means strategic. Prime Minister Trudeau might be forgiven for his initial response to a question in Cuba that

resulted in him sharply contrasting the Canadian approach to that country. Nevertheless, over 20 Canadian and international dailies carried an article along the lines of "Trump's election 'won't change' Canada-Cuba ties." Then, the Prime Minister provided an over-the-top eulogy to the just-departed Fidel Castro that prompted US Senator Marco Rubio to ask "Is this a real statement or a parody? Because if this is a real statement from the PM of Canada it is shameful and embarrassing." Finally, the Trudeau government announced that it would commence an interim purchase of eighteen F/A-18 Super Hornets and put off the full replacement of Canada's 30-year-old fighters for some five years. Worryingly, this announcement was not accompanied by any suggestion that the government had conferred with the US government, despite the fact that the purchase was tied to the need to urgently reinforce our NORAD and NATO contributions.

As a sovereign nation, Canada can do any of the above, independent of the US. What must be kept in mind, however, is that the Canada-US relationship is vast and areas of potential dispute are many. It is almost certain there will be changes to NAFTA and this has the potential to significantly affect our trade-dependent economy. Further, it is not hard to imagine the potential problems we will have with our entirely justifiable immigration policy if these new citizens from the Middle East find they need especially marked passports or visas to travel to the United States. The issue of climate change is guaranteed to highlight our differences as will the question of defence burden sharing. Disputes are thus inevitable and Canada must pick its battles with the US with care. Doing so over Cuba does not seem to meet this test. Moreover, the Super Hornet purchase could actually have become a good news story both here and in the US if we had waited until just after Trump inauguration and discussed it with them. As it involves a "win" for Boeing, if a loss for Lockheed Martin, one could expect no US opposition.

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