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## **Grand Strategy Symposium Overview**

### **Lieutenant-Colonel Angelo N. Caravaggio, Ph.D.**

*The Grand Strategy Symposium was co-sponsored by the Centre for National Security Studies and the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy. The symposium was conducted under Chatham House Rules, and therefore, there are no quotes or comments attributed to a particular speaker.*

On 6 and 7 April 2011, a distinguished group of scholars and former Canadian politicians met at the Centre for National Security Studies (CNSS) at the Canadian Forces College (CFC) in Toronto to consider the question, "Does Canada Need a Grand Strategy?" The three panels and invited guest speakers considered the following questions: "What is Grand Strategy and has Canada followed a defined strategy in the past?" The third panel was designed to provide an international perspective of grand strategy expressed from American, British and Israeli points of view. Workshops were conducted over two days. The initial workshop session was regionally focused and the second session was issue-focused, considering such topics as cybernetics, transportation and communications, and failing states. The workshops were designed to ascertain key factors in setting an integrated set of goals for future Canadian international engagement.

It became clear very early in the discussions that many felt uncomfortable pairing the word "grand" with past Canadian historical actions or political international engagement. Most felt comfortable with the concept of "grand" as a modifier of things all-encompassing, but again, using the word in relation to Canada seemed somewhat "un-Canadian." As a practical concept, grand strategy seems perfectly plausible for great powers such as the United States and China, perhaps even Russia and India, but the idea of promoting a grand strategy for Canada was seen as a "bridge too far." Williamson Murray would support this assertion when he stated that: "Grand Strategy is a matter involving great states alone. No small states, and few medium-size states, possess the possibility of crafting a grand strategy."<sup>1</sup>

Grand Strategy lies at the nexus of national political will and national potential and is heavily influenced by political, social, economic and military realities. No theoretical construct, no set of abstract principles, no political science model has yet been designed that has captured the essence of grand strategy. This is due in part to the fact that grand strategy exists in a world of flux where leaders have little control over the actual course taken and where uncertainty and ambiguity dominate. The international environment will more often than not have its say, causing the fundamental assumptions of the strategy to come under constant assault from events and attitudes both internal and external.

Numerous definitions of grand strategy and strategy were presented, but a consensus on a concise, clear definition of grand strategy was impossible, due in part to the very complex nature of the phenomenon. The definition by John Lewis Gaddis describing it as the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, and objectives to resources, embodied most of the main elements of grand strategy as presented and discussed by the panels, but it failed to capture the unique geopolitical circumstances that define each state before the process can

begin. In trying to define "Grand" in the Canadian context, it was described as not meaning "big" but rather a measure of the boldness of the vision and the capacity that Canadian potential could represent.

Conceptually, Canada possesses all of the necessary elements required of a nation trying to formulate a grand strategy. Our geopolitical realities have consigned to us a geographic position where distance and the sea have traditionally given Canadian decision-makers time to prepare and react to world events. In addition, Canada is integrated historically, physically and economically with one of the current world superpowers — the United States.<sup>2</sup> Strategically secure, Canada sits atop a vast treasure of economic potential represented by our significant reserves of natural resources that provide Canadian leaders with more options than problems.

Yet this geopolitical reality has constrained Canadian options as to how and why we as a nation engage the rest of the world. Canada as a nation has one national strategic imperative: whatever we do on the international stage, do not jeopardize the unique dynamic of the Canada-U.S. relationship. This does not mean that the two countries cannot disagree from time to time on certain issues. When these disagreements occur, they must be of a nature so as to not endanger the fabric of the Canada-U.S. relationship. Consequently, Canada needs to understand the grand strategy of the US and how it shapes and/or constrains Canada's ability to manoeuvre. Given the current US situation (involved in numerous wars, strained military resources and spiralling national debt), US Grand Strategy, if in fact there is one at the moment, is unclear, and therefore, Canadian leaders must tread cautiously in the near term.

Grand strategy, by its very nature, is a complex and multilayered concept. A nation's geography, historical experience, and culture will exercise a heavy but often unseen influence over the making of national grand strategy. The formulation of strategy requires assumptions about one nation and the future world in order to plot a direction for the way ahead. At its core, however, is nothing more than a state's long-term plan to survive and thrive in what can be a chaotic and unpredictable world. The goal of every nation, after all, is to survive and hopefully survive on its own terms.

The execution of grand strategy is exceedingly difficult.<sup>3</sup> Given the enormous uncertainties within which it must operate and the prevailing forces that work upon it, all approaches to strategy must rest on assumptions in order to drive the process. The key to success and failure lies with the leaders and decision-makers behind the process. They must be prepared and open to revisiting the original assumptions, re-evaluating their relevance to the realities actually faced, and if needed, discarding the old assumptions for new ones.<sup>4</sup>

The reality for all strategic-level leaders is that there is no certainty in decision-making at the strategic level. *Murphy's Law* exists at every level. Unforecasted and unforeseen events will reshape the situation, calling for new assumptions and a modified plan. Strategy, therefore, will almost never be executed as conceived. The intellectual capacities and capabilities that support the plan must, therefore, be nimble and flexible, able to react and to modify the course as events unfold.<sup>5</sup>

The strategic plan must be supportable and sustainable. In a democratic society, a strategic plan must transcend partisan politics in favour of a national unity of purpose. This unity of purpose must be conveyed in a convincing and intelligent

narrative to the nation's citizens in order to garner their continued long-term support.<sup>6</sup>

The discussions made clear that future strategy will be shaped by new factors that would never have been previously considered in the arena of defence or security. Climate change, pandemics, the proliferation of non-state actors, and changing demographics, to name a few, have exponentially increased the complexity of strategic planning. Within these larger geopolitical trends, a renewed international focus on the challenges and resources required to operate in both the Arctic and the Pacific regions has shaped and will reshape national strategies.

## **Canada**

Canada enjoyed a period of elevated international influence immediately after the Second World War and into the mid-1950s, with the North Atlantic triangle of Europe, the United States and Canada providing the symbolic base for Canadian strategy and international engagement. Despite the shifting global environment since that time, the geopolitical ingredients of Canadian security have remained consistent. They include security of Canada, security of North America, security of the North Atlantic, and security of the world at large.

NATO and the UN have been at the core of Canadian international engagement since the Second World War. The geopolitical factors that underpinned that strategy remained remarkably consistent throughout the era of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent redefining of the political landscape in Europe and most of Africa. The attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 fractured the normalcy of the old security paradigm and created a new and vastly different security environment.

The new rationale for international engagement is now being associated with the concept or desire for legitimacy. Legitimacy has become the new currency of power projection. Legitimacy has typically been defined as either NATO-led action or action supported by a UN resolution. Most recently the concept of "Responsibility to Protect (R2P)" has been used as the enabler for legitimacy for international operations. A problem, however, is that international organizations project their own strategies which sometimes can be in conflict with either national strategies or the strategies of the greater coalition.

Even though action through NATO and UN coalitions has been the norm since the end of the Cold War, rarely have alliances or coalitions of the willing worked seamlessly and without friction. More often than not the leaders of the alliance nations or partnering countries have decided on action or inaction based in large part on the interests of the individual nation rather than on a fundamental belief in the solidarity of alliance action. Strategy within the context of an alliance, even under the most desperate conditions of war, demands compromise and in most cases results in an uneven or unbalanced commitment among alliance partners as witnessed in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Two underlying questions permeate the dialogue when it comes time to decide on whether national resources will be expended: "What is the threat?" and "What are our national interests?" in the respective nation or region.

The current major concern for Canadian security is the future path of the United States. If the relationship that has been built up between the two countries changes and Canada is perceived as either an economic or political threat or liability by the

United States, then the nature of the entire Canadian outlook will be considerably changed. Unfortunately, it is currently unclear where the US strategy is going. It is equally clear that the *status quo* within American domestic and foreign policy is no longer sustainable.

One specific example was the United States position with respect to Europe. After 60 years of formal engagement, the view was expressed that it was now time for the United States to leave Europe and that a reprioritization of American interests was inevitably coming. Engagement would now be targeted and nation-specific. The two key questions for Canada will become: "How will the new US direction affect Canada?" and "How will the new US direction either knowingly or unknowingly restrain or confine Canadian actions?" The optimists of the group believed that the current U.S. situation will create opportunities for Canada, if available mechanisms and capabilities allow her to take advantage of the situation.

Can a small or middle power such as Canada have a grand strategy? This was the focus of considerable discussion. It was argued that Canada lacks the human, industrial and economic resources to have a grand strategy. Yet any state, regardless of its size, has vital and fundamental long-term interests it must protect. Protecting interests requires engagement, but in this debate Canada's ability and capabilities to influence were viewed as finite.

The finite nature of Canadian capabilities demands that Canadian action avoid trivial engagements where national or vital interests are not clear. Canada can, however, be effective influencing on specific topics. The key to success requires a high level of unity of purpose and integration of capabilities. Public engagement was viewed as the number one requirement of strategic leadership prior to the commitment of any Canadian resources.

International engagement involves influencing others. When we cannot influence or do not agree, then Canada must be prepared to walk away. The key to successful international engagement is to not acquire ownership of events or situations that we cannot control. A specific recommendation from the symposium was that Canada must pursue a policy of no unnecessary, open-ended or entangling commitments.

The lack of stability in the current international picture was a recurring theme. Africa remains a complex subject with 25 states at risk of collapse, and with social and health issues across the region seemingly overwhelming in their size and complexity. Canada could easily become engaged in Africa, but without an overriding strategy and focus, Canadian efforts would be easily diluted and its impact squandered. The fundamental question was asked, is there a national or vital interest for Canada in Africa? If not, how then does a government justify a commitment of Canadian resources?

The regions of Central and South America were viewed as game changers for the international environment in the near future. Twenty-five percent of the United States population is expected to be of Latino descent by 2050, which translates into a greater United States interest in the region. This region holds G8 economies. Engagement beyond NAFTA to include a free-trade bloc of the Americas was considered the way ahead with any Canadian engagement focussed on a regional strategy based on governance rather than security.

The current unrest in the Middle East has increased the complexity of any Canadian involvement in this region. The security threat that has emerged has been caused by failing states, on the one hand, and others trying to become regional powers as is the case with Iran. Any action, in order to have value and to be seen as without pretext, would have to be accomplished through international agencies. It was clear, however, that current and future Canadian policy in the Middle East was in need of new benchmarks and that a comprehensive, rather than a unilateral approach, was needed. Key to any new Canadian initiatives in the region is a better understanding of the complexity of the region. In this vein, better education, knowledge and intelligence on the region by Canadian agencies is paramount to any future successful engagement.

The Arctic was viewed as "fertile ground for Canadian strategy." The Arctic is changing rapidly with the concern over the extinction of a way of life overtaken by an increased interest in the substantial resource possibilities that exist in the region. The key question for the Arctic is: "What are we defending?" Many of the Canadian Arctic issues are being faced by many of our NATO allies and Arctic neighbours. A Canadian strategy in the north is going to require a whole-of-government approach on both the domestic and international fronts. The current lack of infrastructure was viewed as a significant issue in any plan that was developed. A lack of infrastructure and the physical nature of the environment suggest that regardless of the approach adopted for Arctic engagement, the cost will be expensive. A key recommendation in moving forward in Arctic engagement was leveraging and modifying current NORAD capabilities to allow the organization to function in both the aerospace and maritime spheres.

Transport and communications security was viewed as a vital element of the national fabric, and yet, there have been no significant policies or policy statements made in this critical area. The last transportation policy was issued in 2000 and is in need of fundamental review. The current policy is currently scheduled for review in 2014, which was viewed as too late, given the critical influence that transportation and communication have on the Canadian economy.

In the discussion of trade, commerce and monetary policy, it was felt that Canada could have the greatest impact and be most competitive through a greater production of knowledge. Canada must decide where it wants to be competitive and develop the competitive skill-sets in those specific areas. Our focus must be on areas where we can add value to products. Future Canadian strategies must become more engaged in the trans-Pacific economies.

The apparent lack of a fundamental commitment in the cybernetic domain was viewed as a significant weakness in Canadian strategy. Cybernetics continues to be a significant concern, with many elements of this domain continually evolving and changing. Cyber-crime represents a significant security threat that transcends the traditional safety of the geographic divide that Canada has enjoyed in the past, and exposes Canadian infrastructure and systems to direct attack. The implementation and persistent review and modification of the recently released Canadian strategy on cybernetics must become and remain a priority for the current and all future Canadian governments.

## **Leadership**

History has shown that the most important factor in the development and execution of successful strategy has been leadership at the top, particularly at the senior political levels, but also across the senior bureaucratic levels of government and the military. Strategic leaders must possess the ability to adapt their strategic and political assumptions and perceptions to the ever-changing international landscape that they confront. Strategic leaders must understand their nation's history; must listen to, observe, and judge shrewdly those who work for them; and must understand the political and strategic environments as environments that never remain static, but are always in flux. They must, therefore, have the ability to adapt with flexibility and nimbleness of thought to evolving domestic and international situations. These two characteristics are viewed as critical personal characteristics of strategic leaders.

Effective strategic leaders intuitively understand that there are second- and third-order effects that result from their actions, and they must have the humility and willingness to accept and learn from their mistakes. Effective leaders rarely, if ever, reinforce failure and understand that they never have the lone say in any international event.<sup>8</sup> There is always another party, or parties, with their own interests at play.

Strategic leaders must also avoid the penchant for superficial, immediate short-term gains over the long-term interests of the state: but strategic patience is a virtue that most political and strategic leaders lack. Ultimately, the number one imperative for politicians is to get re-elected; consequently, most have been unable to shake the emphasis on short-term and partisan promotion. The reality of today's world is that events drive strategy off the page, testing the ability of leaders to cope.

Strategic leaders must work with the reality that resources, national and political will, and national interests will inevitably find themselves out of balance. Strategic-level engagement requires the balancing of risks with ways, ends and means. More importantly, effective strategic leaders must ensure that the balance is right in those areas that matter the most.<sup>9</sup>

The ability to react requires an investment in capabilities. The selection of which capabilities will be acquired is based on a vision of the future world order and financial capability. Many G8 countries are finding that they cannot afford capabilities across the entire security spectrum and are having to make fundamental choices about which capabilities they will keep. Wanting to react to an international situation and having the capability to react will become problematic. Every country is faced with a capability gap. Accepting the risks and consequences associated with the gaps left unfilled will remain the domain and legacy of our strategic leaders. Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever.<sup>10</sup>

## **Future**

Smaller powers such as Canada have less room for choice on the international stage, but we do have the ability to influence and provide meaningful engagement on specific issues. It is extremely unlikely that Canada, as a nation with global interests, will be immune to the effects of world instability and disorder. The challenge is to respond appropriately to all, some, or none of the potential threats

deriving from the current and future global environment within the constraints imposed by our current geopolitical environment. Globalization and the continued integration of world technology and economies will ensure that there will be no easy, simple solutions to world problems; there will only be choices. Providing a government-wide framework for rationalizing the most appropriate choice is unfortunately lacking in Canada.

Conceptually, there is a need to focus and integrate all of the elements of national power within a construct that guides and lends legitimacy to Canadian international engagement. The debate continues to rage surrounding how national objectives are best realized and what strategies are best employed in the chaotic world of international affairs. Yet, Canada must have a process for integrating national capacities to ensure that our efforts are not squandered and that the most appropriate response is initiated. The history of Canadian international engagement was, and is, guided more by who can respond, rather than by what is the best response for Canada.

Is there a strategic path that would protect Canada, its interests and its values more effectively than simply reacting to the next great crisis?<sup>11</sup> The aim of any Canadian strategy must be the survival of Canada as an independent sovereign nation. At present, the Canadian national leadership is being confronted with a dynamic, confusing and uncertain strategic environment. A strategy for Canadian international engagement must evolve from an expression of national interests which are then balanced against national capacity and national will. A fundamental dialogue with Canadians is required to enunciate what our national interests are, and a case must be made with Canadians themselves to facilitate and provide the rationale for international engagement whenever Canadian assets are deployed.

Canada needs a renewed national security framework that captures the capabilities from across the whole of government and then utilizes those capabilities in support of national interests. The framework must be one, like that of the United States, which is subjected to systematic review to ensure that its fundamental assumptions remain valid. The strategic framework must be one that fits the overall political and security realities of Canada, and it must be flexible and responsive enough to shift as the process converts planning assumptions into the reality of the world situation. The importance of a coherent approach to strategy — one that is flexible, is realistic, and above all, connects means to ends — is required in the Canadian system.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Over the centuries, some governments and their leaders have attempted to chart a course for their nations that has involved more than simply reacting to the course of events. In most cases, they have confronted sudden and major changes in the international environment, often resulting from the outbreak of conflicts, but at times involving economic, strategic or political alterations that threaten the stability or even existence of their policies.<sup>12</sup> Strategy is at the mercy of uncontrollable and often unpredictable political, economic, and military winds and currents. Executing a strategy effectively requires both alertness to those changes that inevitably occur and a constant tiller correction. In the end, it will be adaptability — together with “a good deal of luck — that is likely to determine a nation’s strategic success.”<sup>13</sup>



## **Director CNSS Comment**

Strategy lies in the human spheres of imagination and passion. Strategy lies in the human ability to explore and conceptualize a future state. Of prime importance, and often missed in the many definitions of strategy, is that strategy is an intellectual process.

Successful strategy invariably involves the guiding hand of individuals rather than an effective bureaucratic system which is more focused on process and issues.<sup>14</sup> The concern was expressed that Canada, as a nation, has lost the ability to think strategically. As more and more Canadian government departments are asked to participate in the "away game", the ability to plan and think strategically across all of government will become more important.

As Henry Kissinger once stated, the responsibility of statesmen is to resolve complexity rather than to contemplate it.<sup>15</sup> Making sense of, and providing meaning to, the often chaotic nature of world events are the prime responsibility of the strategic level. To try to comprehend and then decide where, when and why Canadian resources are to be committed will be done based on the available information and advice given to the strategic-level leadership.

Effective decision-making is a function of the quality of the information available to the decision-maker. Canada therefore needs a strong, knowledgeable and experienced diplomatic corps to provide that advice, and an intelligence-gathering capability both electronic and human, in order to provide independent and Canadian-focused advice and information to our strategic leaders. Along with cybernetics, strengthening our intelligence-gathering capabilities and our diplomatic corps were viewed as vital components of effective future Canadian international engagement.

The new Cabinet Committee on National Security headed by the Prime Minister is a clear indication that there is renewed focus on the integration of all Canadian capabilities towards security. The CFC and the CNSS have the capacity and the educational framework to be the focus of whole-of-government education in the critical areas of strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic leadership and policy formulation and planning. The potential exists to establish a national institution to prepare the senior leaders of tomorrow, across all government departments, with the capabilities needed to operate effectively at the strategic level.

## **Participating Speakers and Panelists**

Dr. Uzi Arad	Dr. Rob Huebert
Dr. Rob Barrett	Rear Admiral Eric McVadon (Retired)
Dr. David Bercuson	Dr. Pierre Pahlavi
Ms. Alex Bugailiskis	The Honourable David Pratt
Dr. Paul Chapin	Dr. Harvey Rishikof
Dr. Adam Chapnick	Dr. Harvey Sapolsky
Dr. Miloud Chennoufi	Dr. Dennis Stairs
Dr. Mark Entwistle	Dr. Craig Stone
Dr. John Ferris	Mr. Kees van Haperen
The Honourable Bill Graham	Dr. Randy Wakelam
Dr. Jack Granatstein	Dr. Peter Wallis
Dr. David Haglund	Dr. David Wright

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- <sup>1</sup>Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy", in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-2.
- <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>4</sup>Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich and James Lacey, eds., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 180.
- <sup>5</sup>Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy", 5.
- <sup>6</sup>Murray, Sinnreich and Lacey, *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War*, 181
- <sup>7</sup>Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy", 26.
- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>13</sup>Richard Hart Sinnreich, "Patterns of Grand Strategy", in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 256.
- <sup>14</sup>Murray, "Thoughts on Grand Strategy", 9.
- <sup>15</sup>Colin Gray, "Harry Truman and the Forming of American Grand Strategy in the Cold War", in *The Shaping of Grand Strategy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 219.