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CANADA'S ONLY VITAL NATIONAL INTEREST:
CLOSE ALLIANCE WITH THE UNITED STATES.¹

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In 1549 the scholars of the Church of England amended the ancient *Book of Common Prayer*, but revealed their worry of criticism and defended their efforts in the very first sentence of the preface to that work. "There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised or so sure established which the continuance of time hath not corrupted." Clearly, if the revisionists of 1549 were among us today they would be startled to find that Canadian scholars and politicians have overturned this dictum. They have created a catechism of national interests so well devised and sure established as to be beyond corruption and never in need of change. Or have they?

I was asked by the *Conference of Defence Associations Institute* to consider the principles underlying Canada's national interests and to place them in the context of strategic directions for national security and defence policies. I found the assignment more perplexing than I had anticipated. I am cautious of statements of principles as the foundation of public policies especially when people define principles as "fundamental truths or laws as the basis of reasoning or action." This definition allows little room for change or flexibility in policies. Rather, I think of policy as being rooted not in lofty principles, but in identifiable ideas.

This conceptual approach to policy analysis has many advantages, unless of course you can conceive of 'idealess policy' — a state of affairs, a cynic might say, that is not entirely implausible in Canadian government. For this discussion then, let us assume that our interests are based not so much in principles as in identifiable ideas, and that policy is expressed as these "ideas in action." Moreover, assume that interests are more what is, than what ought to be; more observable outcomes, than normative recommendations; and more pragmatism than rationalism. Together these assumptions lead us to think of national interests as ideas reflected by Canadians' attitudes and actions and expressed collectively in the actions of the governments they elect to represent them.

¹ . A version of this paper was presented originally at the conference of Defence Associations Institute seminar, 15 February 2007, at Ottawa.

Five long-standing ideas have defined Canada's national interests and served as the foundation for our national security, defence, and foreign policies. But can they serve us well into the future? We should begin by assuming that it is not beyond the wit of Canadians to amend these ideas if the circumstances that brought them into being have passed and emerging realities demand policies set in new ideas. Let us consider these five ideas individually and then bring them together in the context of what some see as a fracturing Canadian society.

The continuance of a unified state — Canada as a nation — is the cardinal idea that underlies all aspects of our national interest. But this fundamental idea should express more than the notion that Canada ought to be maintained merely as a secure geographic or political entity. Rather, it should hold to a grander idea: Canada must continue to exist as a secure, liberal democracy, a founding idea embedded in our constitution, expressed in our laws and in the deliberations of Canada's courts. The preservation of Canada as a secure, liberal democracy is the garnish on every politician's rhetoric. "There is no greater responsibility," politicians say, "than the protection of Canada and Canadians." Yet the idea is not always evident in the actions of governments and citizens.

Are the premises behind this declared responsibility — that Canada is a nation and that protecting the nation is the cardinal interest — much more than standing rhetoric? The question arises not simply because governments do not provide (by some credible assessments) sufficient funds to make the idea concrete — by not maintaining the Canadian Forces, for example — but also because the ideas that sustain Canada as a nation may be fast fading in the minds of Canadians.

The Liberal defence policy statement of 1994 contained this warning: "It may be said, that a nation not worth defending is a nation not worth preserving." In 2007, one might wonder if the 1994 statement has been turned around to read: "It may be said that a nation not worth preserving is a nation not worth defending." In other words, why worry about national interests aimed at preserving the nation, if citizens are not concerned about or are drifting away from any meaningful or practical interest in the idea of Canada as a nation? This question deserves our respect and I will return to it later in this paper.

The second incorruptible idea that serves as the immovable, indestructible, and invariable plank in every political party's platform on national defence is that Canada is naturally secure. Our national interest requires governments to maintain this condition by encouraging other states to ensure our security at the least expense and bother to Canadians and their domestic preoccupations. This idea, this assumption of natural security, however, may no longer be valid.

When Canadian leaders speak about national defence they fall back on one idea that is as inevitable as a *Conference of Defence Associations* meeting in Ottawa in February. At every

conference someone will quote Senator Raoul Dandurand who, in 1924, described Canada as “a fireproof house far from inflammable materials.” It is a trustworthy observation, but the good senator discovered another idea beloved by Canadian politicians then and now. When asked what Canada should do to protect its sovereignty, Senator Dandurand advised Canadian leaders “to be quiet and give no one cause for alarm.”

These two ideas have comforted prime ministers from Laurier to Chrétien. Indeed, Prime Minister Harper may be in trouble on this file because he broke the rule and is not quiet in matters of national defence and gives some Canadians cause for alarm.

These two notions provide the first timber in Canada’s strategic conceptual framework: “There is no threat, and if there were one, the Americans will save us.” This fundamental idea, this first fact of national life, sustains the notion that Canada is naturally secure. It encourages governments to invent policies that keep flammable material far away, give no one cause for alarm, and that look for security by free-riding on the efforts of our big, southern friend. Central to these policies is a foreign policy intended to reinforce in the minds of American defence planners the idea that the defence of the United States is inseparable from the defence of Canada. But can we play the great Canadian game in the future?

Free-riding on the American eagle may be approaching the final terminal because the threat to North America has fundamentally changed. Technological advances in space surveillance and other technologies also continue to erode the assumption of the inseparable interdependence of continental security and defence. The plain fact is that the United States has less need of our territory and, therefore, less need to save us.

Over the long Cold War years, Canada provided Congress and senior American officers with credible assurances that the United States could not be attacked through Canadian territory. But today, three factors — the decline in Canada’s military capabilities; Canadian reluctance to acknowledge the idea of interdependent continental defence, as in the ballistic missile defence policy debacle; and the unending enthusiasm on the political left in Canada to crow continually that Canada must be defined in every instance as ‘not the United States’ — may negate the credibility of any assurance we now proclaim in Washington. If Canada is to sustain its natural security, then political leaders must find credible ways to make Canada relevant to the security of the United States in the face of a changing threat profile and technological defence innovations on the American side of the border.

A third idea — Canadians’ believe that our security and defence interests are fixed in the image of international conflict as disputes between states that unfold more or less according to an invariable sequence of events. Canadians believe that conflicts result from some immediate cause; occur in some legally identifiable space; are directed and controlled by legitimate political

leaders; and that warfare leads to victory or an agreed resolution of immediate causes, followed by a new peaceful order and some degree of demobilization. Defence policies, strategies and military organizations until now were predicated on the assumption that conflicts have boundaries in time — “We’ll be home by Christmas” sang the soldiers in August 1914. Thus, today we see our political community’s impatience with even short wars and the public’s demand for ‘exit strategies’ before we commit our soldiers to conflicts no matter the realities of the situation.

When conflicts do not unfold according to the expected sequence and when enemies do not follow regular patterns and western doctrine, we speak in the west of ‘asymmetric warfare’ and ‘irregular warfare.’ But reality and experience paint a different picture. The wars we fight today and others like them we will fight tomorrow are not asymmetric or irregular, they are the real thing: the new regular warfare.

Beginning about 1990 we entered a new era of continuous warfare — a concept not seen since the Middle Ages. Continuous warfare may be defined as wars that endure in various degrees of intensity without end, simply because no belligerent has the power to overcome any other or no politician has the power and legitimacy to control local conflicts or bring them to an end. This new regular pattern of warfare involves military and paramilitary forces, “low-tech” weapons and devices, intermingled military and political authorities, contrasting and contradictory aims, intense fighting interspersed with “cease fires,” and truces followed by the resumption of disorder. Importantly, the concept of continuous warfare is joined to the insightful idea General Sir Rupert Smith has added to the dialogue — these wars are not only continuous, but they are also in his words, “wars among the people.”

Continuous wars fought among the people are conceptually different in most important respects from our untransformed images of warfare since 1914. Scant consideration is given to non-combatants, traditional icons, or cherished institutions. Indeed, these very things may be the preferred targets on all sides. The people, no matter their communal status, may be in turn hostages, shields, targets, occasional and situational participants, and even willing victims — the term, non-combatant, in most cases has little or no relevance in such conflicts.

By definition, there is no exit strategy from continuous warfare. But even more perplexing for western policy makers and citizens is the accidental collision of the idea of continuous warfare among the people and the new liberal idea that the so-called global community is obliged to intervene in conflicts among the people. Certainly, that is the commitment nations are expected to carry under the UN doctrine of “the responsibility to protect.”

For Canada then, how do we reconcile this collision of ideas and circumstances with the demands of our national interests? What foreign and defence policies and military doctrines, organizations, and structures do we need to construct? More critical perhaps, what conflicts should we join, on whose side, for how long, and how do we know any answers to these questions before the fact? The transformation of Canadian defence policy and the Canadian Forces has not even begun, because our ideas about warfare and international relations on which transformation must stand have not themselves been transformed.

A fourth foundational idea on which Canada's defence and foreign policies rests, holds that Canada's national interests are best served by alliances. Since about 1950, this idea has been expressed by a strategy of commitments – mainly to NATO, cooperation with the United States in North America, and to the *idea of the UN*. But military officers today face a different set of problems in an environment of weakening alliances and loose commitments. They ask, "What shall we do practically in circumstances of dynamic alliances of the moment and hurried planning for unpredicted operations against unanticipated enemies in places of which we know nothing?" If the national interests are to be served by the idea of "alliancemanship," then the crucial questions are these: alliance where, when, with whom, and for what specific national interest?

The collapse of the idea and the predictable consequences of the strategy of commitments returns us full circle to 1947, the time before the Cold War began in earnest and provided Canada by 1951 with a list of concrete defence commitments. Before NATO, Brooke Claxton, the defence minister at the time, defined Canada's international security interests as a willingness "to carry out any undertaking which by our own voluntary act we may assume in cooperation with friendly nations or under any effective plan of collective action under the United Nations."

Clearly, there was no commitment here. Rather, the idea sends a strong message that Parliament would decide what is to be done in each and every circumstance, all of which were expected to be different. Mackenzie King's always useful ambiguity is as helpful today as it was to him in other times: commitments if necessary, but not necessarily permanent commitments. In the turmoil of a world of continuous warfare and uncertain belligerents and demands for alliances of the moment, there are only two strategic imperatives for Canada — the defence of Canada and alliance with the United States in the defence of North America. Beyond these two imperatives, all else is national choice.

National interests based on a strategy of strategic imperatives and strategic choice demand a federal bureaucratic, military, and political structure capable of formulating promptly relevant 'whole-of-government' policies in the face of dynamic circumstances. But as the fitful struggles of the machinery of government in Ottawa today demonstrate as it tries to manage the

war in Afghanistan, we have not even begun to understand the whole-of-government challenges facing Canadian governments and Canada's national interests in the new circumstance of the early 21st century.

The fifth guiding idea follows from the fourth, but it is really a confusion of competing visions and directions. Our defence and foreign policies have reflected since at least Pierre Trudeau's time, a struggle between three competing ideas: that Canada's economic and security well-being are depend on a close, respectful relationship with the United States and the idea that Canada is an Atlantic nation whose interests are inseparable from the bonds joining us to Europe and our 'like-mindedness' with Europeans generally. Finally, both these orientations are challenged — especially over the last 12 years — by the idea that our interests are better served by allegiance to the ideas of collective security managed by the United Nations. We are encouraged to support concepts, like “the responsibility to protect,” that demand a commitment to entanglement in the interests of the so-called global community whether there is a direct Canadian national interest at stake or not. In our national interest, which idea should command? Where, if at all, should Canada go in search of security through alliances?

Let me deal with these tensions and this confusion by considering first Europe, then the UN, and finally the United States. NATO, since 1950, has been the essence of our defence and foreign policies and the institutional link to Europe. It has served us well. But Berlin is secure. The new fractures in international relations are reorienting interests in Europe and in the United States from east-west to north-south and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Indeed, a unified Europe may be turning inward. To most Europeans, Canada is already America or at best a small group of people living in a few acres of snow who dislike the United States. We are of little consequence to European interests and have no influence on where Europe will travel.

One thing is clear: Canada can no longer assume that the North Atlantic alliance is fundamentally strong or that European interests inevitably coincide with ours. We may no longer be 'like-minded states.' More important, our national interests cannot abide policies aimed at pleasing Europe if they threaten to disrupt practically our relations with the United States. Canadian politicians need to consider this question: How does supplementing the defence of a unified European competitor in international trade and investment serve our national interests?

Canada's interests in the next 50 years will be best served if we remain nominally allied with Europe within the North Atlantic alliance, but immediately begin to reduce and remove any commitment to European Union security and defence. We should, as well, discourage Europeans from any assumption they may have that we would, except *in extremis*, take a European point of view in opposition to an independent Canadian or pro-American stance in international affairs. European diplomats should expect us to do unto them – to ignore their interests – as they have

done unto us — ignore ours interests, most recently in Afghanistan. We've done our bit to defend Europe – so good-bye to all that.

The UN is gradually moving under the control of states that do not share and in some cases are openly hostile to our core value – the defence and maintenance of liberal democracy. The organization is, besides, an administrative wasteland. Every year billions of dollars are swallowed up in unaccountable projects and even the office of the Secretary General has been implicated in graft and corruption. The UN might be useful to direct some forms of international humanitarian aid and to provide a grandstand upon which even the most miserable dictator can pretend he is a world leader. Though some true believers may hold to the UN as a parish priest is held to his religion, by faith --- “a belief not requiring proof,” Canadians should not expect faith in the UN and the idea of collective security to assure Canada's unity and liberal democracy.

If Canadian defence and security policy choices are to escape the clutches of the UN true believers, then we must begin by diminishing the power of the four myths of peacekeeping Canadians love to tell each other. Myth one – Canada (Lester Pearson) invented peacekeeping and Canada, therefore, must guard forever the holy chalice and participate in every UN mission. Myth two, peacekeeping is a selfless activity undertaken in the interests of the global community. Myth three, peacekeeping is not warfare which fits Canadian traditions because Canada never has advanced and cannot advance its national interests by waging war or by joining alliances outside the dictates of the UN. Myth four, the mandate of the Canadian Forces is ‘peacekeeping.’

In place of these myths Canadians ought to substitute and build a consensus on this more practical, realistic, and useful idea. Canada should join coalitions which support our national interests and those of our close allies after parliamentary consideration of the facts unhindered by the myths of peacekeeping and the assumed requirements of the so-called global community – UN missions related closely to our national interests might be among them.

So if Canada is not an Atlantic nation as Canadians once believed, and if the UN is incapable of guarding our national interests, whither Canada? The question, of course, brings us to America, a term used to acknowledge not only the United States, but also to locate Canada in the idea of the western hemisphere as a coherent, political entity.

The United States, though tangled in the duties of a great power and the momentary bother in the Middle East, is turning to its natural and historic interests in the western hemisphere and the Pacific – or more broadly to Latin America, Asia and China. Nevertheless, America, for better or worse, is the inevitable determinant of Canada's primary interests. We need to understand, therefore, how to become ‘America's greatest friend’ so as to keep inflammable material from our door, give no one cause for alarm, and entangle the United States in our

primary national interest, the preservation of Canada as a free and secure liberal democracy. How might we do this?

There is one area of mutual interest where Canada might become more relevant to Washington in our own interest; that is, in matters related to western hemispheric economies, trade, diplomacy, and security. We could be to many Latin American and Caribbean states – “not the United States.” We could be in the western hemisphere a second option for states looking for trade and diplomacy and an alliance that better matches their history, culture, economies and scale of government than does their present relationship with the United States.

Canada has a strategic advantage — a competitive advantage — over most other nations vis-a-vis the United States because Canada resides within the Monroe Doctrine where most other nations do not and cannot. By concentrating our policies in the western hemisphere in ways that make Canada useful to American national interests we might find the basis for a true ‘special relationship’ with Washington. It is a possibility that Canada should explore aggressively.

By this strategy, Canada’s essential foreign policy objective would be directed at enhancing Canada’s self-interests by defining itself as a western hemispheric nation and holding fast to the United States through the reasonable acceptance of America’s own views of its national interests; by maintaining appropriate national security policies and resources; and by taking a leadership role in helping to advance a new coalition of stable liberal democracies in the Western Hemisphere. The old jest is that Canada is a regional power without a region – perhaps we can find one in the western hemisphere.

But finally, does this discourse matter if the cardinal national interest, here defined as the continuance of Canada as a unified, liberal democracy — as a coherent nation, is irrelevant to Canadians? Ask yourself these questions: Who in a democracy determines the national interest? Who determines what interests express the will of the people — parliament, political parties, tradition, or academic argument? If national interests are arrived at democratically by the actions of citizens or put another way — as the outcome of citizens’ actions even in the absence of serious debate, is that the national interest? Let us return now to the concern raised at the beginning of this paper.

“It may be said that a nation not worth preserving is a nation not worth defending.” In other words, why worry about national interests and policies to defend the nation, if citizens are not concerned about or are drifting away from any meaningful or practical interest in the idea of Canada as a nation? What results if Canadians by their actions and decisions abandon the idea of Canada as a community of people united by commonly held, fundamental ideas? For instance, how do we define ‘community’ if there is no consensus on the idea that citizenship is an expression not just of a citizen’s ‘rights,’ but also of a citizen’s ‘responsibility’ to forego

personal advantage in pursuit of the common good. Is the definition of the national interest as the defence of Canada as a community based in liberal democratic ideals valid, if Canadian citizens have little understanding of or, worse, interpret these ideals only in the context of their assumed personal or communal rights and interests?

The assumption in most public discussions and academic literature is that Canadians want or are deeply committed to the survival of Canada as a unified, political entity. At least two distracting trends may be working against this assumption. The first distraction is ironic, perhaps even Clio's joke on Canada.

The nation was founded, so the history books tell us, because the Canada was insecure. And the source of our insecurity was the United States. However, since about the end of the American civil war, we have become secure and the source of our security is the United States. More than that, it's a pleasant enough security gained at little real cost – we just have to go with the flow – hardly thinking for ourselves at all or doing anything or spending much to be secure. The first fact of national life makes it so – there is no threat and the Americans will save us if there were one. Our territory, our economy, and our culture such as it is – are all naturally secure. So what is it for which Canadians stand on guard? Health care? Are we left with Canada, merely a nation and a parliament devoted to domestic and social security cares, worried about 'Can-Lit and the CBC?

If one doubts this image of the fading social contract – the irrelevance of defence and security created by the efforts of Canadians — look at the 2006 federal election. Where was the emphasis in debates, policies, and popular concern? National security, economic strategy, or day-care? Who addressed Canada's national interests in any credible or practical way?

But why should political leaders speak beyond rhetoric about preserving and defending Canada? There is no threat and the Americans would save us if there were one. And so, the country and Canadians live on in natural security, a condition that, ironically, makes the idea of the nation – the idea of Canada – insecure.

Our natural security makes discussions about bolstering national security through independent defence and economic policies irrelevant to most Canadians and their leaders. Canada as a protectorate of the United States serves the peoples' concept of their personal interests well enough. Remaining a protectorate of the United States at as little cost as possible is *the* vital national interest and Canadians confirm this interest in every federal election and in every federal budget --- whether they know it or not!

The second distracting trend presents another wicked irony. The idea that Canada is a welcoming country open to immigrants from across the world and that they together with 'native Canadians' can build a strong, multicultural nation may be seriously flawed. It may be that the

policies of diversity that follow from these ideas may be one of several concepts weakening the idea of the nation as community in the minds of citizens to the point of threatening the long-term cohesion of the country. Canadian research published recently shows a general trend away from attachment to Canada in the recent immigrant population. The broad conclusion is that the very celebration of diversity has weakened the sense of a common national culture or shared national identity and set of traditions².

Another hint that the pursuit of diversity as an end in itself may be unsound seems evident in the remarkable change over the last ten years in Canada's selection of the top ten source countries for immigration. If you measure the strength of the idea of the nation as Canadians (and Europeans) generally think of it; that is, as a coherent community and assess also the strength and experience with the idea of liberal democracy in the cultures of the people who make up the top ten source countries for immigration since 1990, the disconnection between conceptual frameworks is worrying.

Prior to 1990 — 88% of immigrants to Canada arrived from states in which the idea of the nation and the ideas and experience of liberal democracy were strong. After 1990 a mere 5 % of immigrants came from such countries. Between 1990 and 2001 almost two million immigrants arrived in Canada from states where, arguably, the idea of the nation is weak and the idea and practices of liberal democracy are all but unknown. If the idea of the nation and the idea of liberal democracy are poorly formed in the minds of immigrants from source countries, then it is unlikely that those ideas will by some invisible hand immediately become central to their attitudes once they are settled here. This effect may be prolonged especially if Canada continues to make no effort to educate new citizens to our traditions and social responsibilities and impossible if resident Canadians hardly understand these traditions and responsibilities themselves.

Besides immigration, research suggests that other social trends are creating unintended, uncontrollable fractures in our society. A wider national unity problem may be building from the dysfunctions of diversity rooted in culture, ethnic demographics, the movement of the populations from the rural to urban life, the growing imbalance between age groups, the dangerous unrest in the aboriginal communities, the clamour in cultural communities about their self-perceived grievances and rights, and from the shift in the traditional economic structure of the country — Ontario's colonies in the west and in the Atlantic provinces are restless.

One can see the effects of this trend in action in Ottawa every day. It glares at Canadians as they quarrel with each other over who pays for social programs, who taxes, who spends, and

² See for example, Keith Banting, et al, *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*. Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montreal, 2007.

in fractious political arguments over ‘equalization payments,’ and ‘the fiscal balance,’ and in special interests scavenging after defence contracts,’ and in nasty assertions by provincial leaders who churn bad blood as they claim their province is being taxed to support another unworthy province. Cities campaign against provinces, provinces against the federals. Who speaks for Canada? Who speaks for the supposed vital national interest?

Let me briefly place these concerns of diversity and the idea of the nation beside worries for the health of the Canadian Forces. We ask, why is the Canadian Forces over-represented by young, white, males and by people who come from military families? The stock answers are that the military as an institution is unwelcoming to “others” and that immigrants from non-white societies, the recent source of our immigrants, avoid the armed forces because of their family’s unfortunate experiences with soldiers in their native state. These premises, however, may be mostly off the mark.

Policies aimed at solving these (perhaps) misconceived problems are exaggerated when policy makers take their cue from a misunderstanding of the old axiom that “an army is a reflection of its society.” This common and mostly reliable maxim is, in essence, an *ex post facto* conclusion derived from observations of reality. Armies, in the absence of perfect, universal conscription, do reflect their societies, but not in the sense that they mirror some statistical or demographic image of domestic society. Armies, in fact, reflect the image of those people in society who, for whatever reason, have a propensity, to join the army and who fit also the army’s image of itself. This observation is absolute in volunteer armies.

Policy planners cannot make the armed forces reflect a society that does not exist. Policy planners cannot make the armed forces reflect a diverse, multicultural society that is attracted to military service and willing to sacrifice personal interests for national interests from a society that does not embody these characteristics in the first place. Canada’s mostly young, white male, armed forces does reflect Canadian society. The Canadian Forces expresses starkly who will serve, distorted (for better or worse) by past efforts to re-engineer the armed forces to reflect a statistical, politically-imposed image of Canadian society. If Canada evolves towards a society composed of citizens without a propensity to serve, then the armed forces recruiting pool will necessarily shrink, unless the premise of military service changes radically (implying yet more intrusive political “initiatives”) or deeply held communal values in the diverse society change even more radically.

Where the idea of the nation is not strong and especially where it is absent, we should not expect citizens to jump to defend or support it. The idea of the nation in European founding cultures implies in some measure a ‘social contract’ between the state and the citizen that implies, furthermore, a mutual interest in and an obligation on both parties to make significant

sacrifices (if necessary) to preserve the state. In many other cultures – including in many cases, the source countries for Canadian immigration — the linked ideas of nation and service to the nation may not be strong, or not even present at all. Indeed, in many cultures the state is the source of personal insecurity and something to be feared.

People from these types of cultures not only do not join the army, they do not join the public service, or police forces, or any other institutions of the state. They run businesses, make money, and support their families and communal societies — all very worthy activities society should encourage. For many people who come to Canada from these cultures and for Canada’s aboriginal “nations,” there are other centres of loyalty – tribe, clan, home and family apart from Canada that serve as the focus of their interests. Where the security of the individual and the family are paramount, compulsion to defend the nation may be in itself a threat.

In some respects, this clash in interests is reinforced by policies aimed at supporting and encouraging diversity which can aggravate fractures between the interests of the cultural community and the idea of Canada. Citizenship in Canada today demands no heavy obligation. In some cases, the nation may be merely a facilitator, an address, and the source of one of any number of reliable passports a citizen might hold for emergencies.

Abe Lincoln at the height of the civil war declared that America could not fail or be conquered by all the armies of Europe and Asia and Africa combined with all the treasures on earth . . . so strong was its constitution and founding ideals – “As a nation of freemen,” he said, “we must live through all time, or die by suicide.”

Canada may escape the suicide of Quebec separatism and the growing fractiousness in society. But ironically, Canada’s openness and diversity and political leaders’ lazy assumption that the nation must live through all time may allow the country, rather like an old soldier, to simply fade away, in effect, if not in name.

The dilemma for those few politicians who carry national responsibilities is to discover how to make Canada’s national interests relevant to Canadians who may be moving rapidly away from thinking of themselves as a coherent community, as a nation, in the traditional sense. But leaders cannot do this if they and Canadians hold tightly to uncontested concepts and unchallenged assumptions about Canadian society and Canada’s place in the world. Perhaps, leaders should heed the warning: “There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised or so sure established which the continuance of time hath not corrupted.” If they did so, then maybe they could lead Canadians together to a new framework of ideas to sustain our most critical national interest, the preservation of a coherent nation --- Canada a secure, liberal, democratic nation in the 21st century.