

CURRENT STATE AND PERSPECTIVES ON FRENCH-CANADIAN RELATIONS

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Summary

At the political level, the relations between France and Canada have often been limited to declarations of joint intent concerning multilateralism or questions of humanitarian issues and international security. Although Paris and Ottawa are allies, this partnership is subject to the transatlantic logic in which Canada is often perceived in Paris as secondary to relations with the United States. In order to improve relations between France and Canada, it is necessary to examine Ottawa's role (and eventually withdrawal) at the international level, and its position in North America.

With Ottawa's progressive withdrawal from the international sphere, its relations with Washington become central to the question of Canada's foreign policy. Several signs seem to indicate that the tight partnership between the neighboring North American countries has been put to the test for the past few years. Disagreement has markedly appeared under the Bush administration, and explains the frictions between Canadian administrators and their American allies. Nevertheless, Ottawa cannot ignore the evolution of its powerful neighbor, and one can consider that Canadian reforms in the domains of security as well as diplomacy with the minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's reforms adhere to this logic.

Thus, parallel to its desire to advocate a stronger multilateralism, Canada will adapt by default to Washington's hemispheric vision that the Bush administration has imposed since September 11 terrorist attacks.

While Canada takes these specificities into consideration, it also distinguishes itself from Washington's objectives in confirming its support for multilateralism. On this point, both liberal and conservative governments share similar approaches, and conform to Canadian public opinion. It would be erroneous to think that the presences of the conservative parties, who still conduct the minority faction and are thus particularly sensitive to other national political forces, would considerably change the data.

The final challenge for Ottawa, at times perceived poorly from the exterior, concerns national unity and the upholding of federalism. Canada must take into account the multiple challenges regarding its unity, especially with Quebec, which sovereign movement could easily propose a referendum for its sovereignty and has been on the rise for the last two years, and Alberta, which for primarily economic reasons has turned increasingly towards the United States and questions its membership in the Union. The same questions concern the whole of Western Canada and thus the very existence of Canada, which can be confronted by a genuine explosion of federalism. Thus, it is not accidental that several Canadian specialists are leaning towards European federalism, both to keep critical European citizens abated and also to see to which measure the European model of construction can help refine their own perception of federalism.

Canada's relations with France are both rich and ambivalent in all these questions. They are enriched by the two countries' historical roots and shared culture, particularly in the province of Quebec, and ambivalent in their difficulty, sometimes notably so, to establish a link between Paris and Ottawa on the one hand, and Paris and Quebec on the other. In order to envision the future of French-Canadian relations and permit a convergence of views offering an alliance on certain issues, especially concerning security, it is necessary to measure Canada's position in the international arena, its relations with the United States, and its role in North America. It is equally important to examine to what extent the values

defended by Ottawa are parallel to those of Paris, and if the prospective in-depth modifications concerning federalism would impact relations with France (notably in the case of Quebec). Only when these different elements are reconciled will it be possible to redefine relations between France and Canada.