

BREAKING DOWN THE FORTRESS

A fundamental rethinking of traditional Member roles with the objective of developing a formal and sustained parliamentary dialogue on Canadian foreign policy

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“The proper office of representative assembly is to watch and control the government.”¹

Historically, the theory of responsible government postulates that the executive, namely the prime minister and the cabinet, is responsible to the legislature. Executive action and policy proposals, therefore, must gain the confidence and the support of the majority of members in the legislature. Superficially, this theoretical underpinning of Canada’s federal political system indicates a degree of power for parliamentarians to act on their own volition and as a check on executive power.² To fully believe this declaration, however, would be to fall victim to one of the great historical myths of Canada’s Parliamentary government. In many ways, the Canadian Parliament is a paradoxical body; its perceived powers and ability to influence policy are wholly challenged by its marginal ability to effect change, particularly in very elite and executive-dominated areas of foreign policy.³ As such, Canada’s legislature has traditionally--at best--been allocated mere rudimentary or ‘rubber stamping’ functions, which allocates a sense of symbolic legitimization to government policy conducted behind closed doors. Given these circumstances, Parliament is not an institution from which many new and serious ideas are allowed to emerge.

The continued chronic lack of parliamentary vigilance in foreign policy and the pervasive liberty of the executive to decide policy in pristine absolutism—often by ignoring parliamentary advice—is a practise which must be rethought. If Canada’s Parliament is ever to play a vital role in the development of external affairs, particularly in the growing area of international law policy issues, such as pollution, energy, refugees, capital flows and investment, this apparent ‘democratic deficit’ and centralization of power must be reconsidered. This is not to say that the executive should be forced to devolve its entire prerogative, particularly in areas which demand timely action, such as the declaration of war. What needs to be done, however, is to fundamentally and substantively increase the dialogue within the confines of Parliament, in order to promote a greater discourse between the legislative and executive branches on what Canada’s role in the world should be.

The main focus of this essay will be to examine, in detail, how a revived spirit for parliamentary dialogue, coupled with a fundamental rethinking of the executive-dominated nature of foreign policy, could rekindle an idling national discourse of Canada’s place in the world. By critically examining the historical notions of executive pre-eminence within the policy process, the role of committees as engaged and informed investigative agents and their primary purpose of being conduits for parliamentarians to have greater and more meaningful input into policy formulation; the present institutional

limitations for parliamentary participation in external policy input and the place of foreign policy review, it will be proven that improving parliament's role within the matrix of 'democratizing' foreign policy is a necessary condition in order to reinvigorate debate on Canadian external affairs, whereby policy outcomes are proactive rather than much of their current reactive nature. Nevertheless, one must remain cognizant that because Canada's liberal democracy is so young, such ambitious changes to Parliament by convention--towards expanding parliamentary views--will, no doubt, take significant time to be realized. It is a necessary process, however, to save the institution from increasing calls of irrelevancy.

THE LOCUS OF POWER: FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND PRIME-MINISTERIAL DOMINANCE

According to doctrine, the formal power to guide Canadian external affairs is the responsibility of the Crown. However, this legal-formal picture resembles little, in reality, to how the system actually operates. As the title of this section denotes, the prime minister is the ultimate purveyor of power in Canada, supported by a cabinet, with the wide-ranging authority over portfolios, such as foreign policy, derived from the royal prerogative. The end result of this wholly centralized institutional arrangement is to have power wielded in the hands of the few, namely the prime minister and the minister in question, for the purpose of this discussion, the minister of foreign affairs. The product of this arrangement allows each prime minister to leave a personal and idiosyncratic mark on Canada's role in the world.⁴

While the prime minister undoubtedly acts as the head of the government and the pre-eminent spokesperson on the country's foreign policy agenda, it should be noted that, due to the centralization of power, if a policy idea did not interest the prime minister, then it would fall by the way-side. Arguably, the greatest perpetrator of this accusation was Mackenzie King. While PM, King "did not encourage members to speak out on international relations."⁵ Moreover, the Foreign Affairs portfolio remained within the Prime Minister's Office until 1946, and no committee on foreign affairs was struck until 1949, once King had left office. As such, King was able to take major foreign policy initiatives largely on his own. For example, in 1946 he decided to pull Canada's soldiers out of Germany, despite vociferous objections from the British. Further, in 1948, Canada was the only Commonwealth country who did not participate in the Berlin airlift, primarily because King feared obligations in Europe.⁶ As Rempel suggests, these issues were not debated in any serious fashion in Parliament.⁷ The laundry list of executive oversight does not end there. Parliament was largely irrelevant in determining the nature of Canada's involvement in Korea in 1950. Furthermore, there was continued policy flip-flopping with regard to Canada's place in military and or peacekeeping missions in Europe and in NATO between 1955-1995,⁸ and major policy shifts via troop reductions in Europe by Pierre Trudeau in 1968-69, contrary to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence.⁹ Another major policy flip-flop was performed by Brian Mulroney, who in March 1985, said he wished to increase Canada's presence in Europe by 20 per cent. Then six months later, Mulroney floated plans to withdraw all soldiers from several countries, particularly Germany.¹⁰

In analyzing the preceding examples, two overarching themes become apparent. The first is that the concentration and centralization of power in the hands of the PM and a few confidants, on many occasions, has proven to be a negative or questionable practise. The second, is that there a clear historical deficiency in the role Parliament plays in the input and formulation of foreign policy, which has spawned a general malaise within the parliamentary ranks, as elected members feel shut out from the process. While critics of an increased role for parliamentarians have argued that Canada's elected representatives are disinterested in foreign policy larger foreign policy questions,¹¹ such an argument seems to be founded on rather tenuous assumptions. As John English has argued, parliamentarians have not been pleased by the fact that they are relegated to the figurative 'back of the room' in foreign policy decision-making.¹² Given the historical marginalization of the legislature's role in impacting foreign policy and the overarching lack of dialogue between elected representatives and the locus of executive power, it is thus not surprising that members have become conditioned with the idea that they have little power, and therefore, have decided to devote their time to pursuing other policy areas. As such, the argument that declares MPs as 'disinterested' or 'uninformed' of the issues or contextual detail of foreign policy presupposes the historical conditions which limit their participation, because many parliamentarians have never known their role to be any other way.

EMPOWERING COMMITTEE WORK:

Canada's Parliament has often been overlooked and shunned as an actor in foreign policy because, while some of its frailties are often cited, much of its work has not received much consideration by the government executive or coverage from the national media.¹³ However, if one is to undertake a fundamental rethinking of parliamentary roles with a political endgame of encouraging greater dialogue and debate on foreign issues, the committee system, without a doubt, should be first and foremost within that examination. As many scholars have noted, with Schmitz and Lee doing so most succinctly, the involvement of the permanent parliamentary standing committees could legitimately serve as the conduits of an increased, even de-politicized, dialogue on Canada's external affairs.¹⁴ Empowered with the ability and mandate to ferret out the views of the many and to dig deeper into policy matters, these underutilized vehicles, rightfully, should possess the vigour necessary to hold government accountable for its decisions and the implementation of its commitment.¹⁵

In recognizing the great hope and inherent idealism for the dialogue theory of increasing participation, indeed, such considerations would inevitably boil down to a question of political will. While critics would allege that any prior commitments to open up foreign policy decision-making would be nothing more than lip-service and fall on deaf ears,¹⁶ such assertions may not be totally correct. While there is still much ground to be made in terms of creating a participatory foreign policy dialogue, one must understand that a fundamental shift in the culture of parliament by convention is a very slow and tedious process. That said there are a few recent examples which do provide cause for optimism within the realm of increased parliamentary oversight of foreign policy.

The first stems from the ability of committees to study questions on an open basis, which was not the case prior to the mid-1980s. Prior to this time, committees could study

only specific questions only after a minister had authorized them to do so.¹⁷ However, by 1985 committees gained the authority to meet year-round and determine their own agenda. This shift has arguably allowed committees to study more controversial topics and to pursue them with added vigour and with greater assistance from other policy insiders, such as academics and other members of the intelligentsia. At the same time, additional parliamentary reforms under the pretence of foreign policy democratization and dialogue were acted upon. For example, matters of defence were assigned to a new Standing Committee on National Defence.¹⁸ Indeed, these example demonstrate a marked shift in structure, especially when one considers that Mackenzie King was unwilling to allow a committee on foreign affairs to exist.¹⁹ Clearly, this newfound sense of independence would be invaluable for integrating parliamentarians with an interest in foreign policy into the decision-making fold, and by extension, promoting an enhanced dialogue.

The second example stems from the Liberal Party Red Book of 1993, which called for a more participatory foreign policy in which parliamentarians would play a central role. According to the document, “A Liberal government will also expand the rights of Parliament to debate major Canadian foreign policy initiatives, such as the deployment of peacekeeping forces, and the rights of Canadians to regular and serious consultation on foreign policy issues.”²⁰ While critics of such a declaration would probably deem such a promise to be nothing more than empty election rhetoric, the Liberal government after 1993 did take some steps to help loosen the executive shackles of foreign policy, with an idea for increased dialogue in mind. After 1993, the Liberal government established a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons to Review Canadian Foreign Policy.²¹ This was a clear and distinct step towards increasing dialogue in foreign policy realm. One need not look further than the Chrétien government’s “white paper” declaration *Canada in the World* to see the many overt references to the efforts and research of the Special Joint Committee on issues as diverse as promoting Canadian culture as a pillar of our foreign policy towards issues of development.²² Thus, while the Red Book commitment to consult Parliament before significant foreign policy decisions are made, at first through House debates and then through debates in committee with expert testimony from department officials and policy experts, has been an important step in laying the crucial groundwork for expanding parliamentary views.²³

That said, critics will argue evermore that opening up foreign policy decision-making to committees and the legislature will not, by itself, solve Canada’s participatory malaise in foreign policy.²⁴ While this argument may be grounded in a modicum of reality, one could equally argue that rethinking parliamentary roles and the current power structure in the foreign policy realm could serve to empower debate on issues ranging from the three ‘D’s’ of defence, diplomacy and development to international trade. Indeed, when looking at the demographic composition of Parliament and its members, one can clearly see an increasing diversity of representatives with international experience, which by extension, lays the legitimate groundwork for members with a strong worldview. For example, in 1970, in a Parliament of 263 members, 16 were born outside Canada, 26 had studied outside of Canada, and 17 had worked beyond Canada’s borders. By 1994, in a Parliament with 295 representatives, 29 were born outside of Canada, 50 studied and 22 had worked outside of the country.²⁵ Evidently, within the

confines of our increasingly globalized world, those numbers will only continue to increase.

Thus, based upon these statistics of the changing nature of the House, one could logically infer that by incorporating these informed actors with personal knowledge and experience of the world into a foreign policy dialogue, ultimately, policy investigations and decisions could legitimately be more diverse, better deliberated and broader in scope. Indeed, one can see how the Foreign Affairs Committee, with many of its members traditionally having previous international experience, has been, in many ways, representative of this ideal, as it has been quite innovative in searching out and conducting numerous special studies on issues ranging from international democratic development to human rights and promoting interesting and proactive policy suggestions.²⁶ Such facts lend credence to what Flora MacDonald, the former Secretary of State for External Affairs stated in 1979, “foreign policy must not be the exclusive preserve of the few, inside or outside government . . . I have stressed, and cannot stress enough, the importance I attach to parliamentary input in our foreign policy.”²⁷ Based upon the preceding analysis, clearly, there does exist a long-standing spirit for creating and sustaining a meaningful foreign policy dialogue in Canada. Surely, the increased allocation of decision-making powers to parliament in the realm of foreign policy would help reinvigorate the institution; quell debates over democratic deficit and overcome many parliamentarians’ historical disillusionment with the foreign policy process because they have been ‘welcomed in’. Indeed, the potential is there.

OBSTRUCTIONS TO DIALOGUE AND THE QUESTION OF REFORM

As we have seen thus far, much of the formal structure and power relations of Parliament is inherently contradictory to the promulgation of increased dialogue within the confines of external affairs. Nevertheless, if Canada’s foreign policy and international *raison d’être* is ever to evolve in accordance with ‘democratized’ means, the question of parliamentary reform is paramount to this consideration. Simply stated, the notions of increased parliamentary dialogue and reform to the composition and culture of the legislature is inexplicably intertwined.

In returning to the important re-conceptualization and empowerment of committees, Docherty²⁸ smartly notes that much of the hope for legislatures to perform their formal scrutiny function rests in the committee system. While the most significant focus on foreign policy today occurs in the Committees on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, there are, nevertheless, many difficulties with the operation of committees which obstructs the possibility for increased foreign policy dialogue. Many of the frustrations of parliamentarians were expressed broadly in a report of the Liaison Committee of Committee Chairs of the 35th Parliament, which was chaired by Bill Graham.²⁹ In its analysis regarding the effectiveness of committees in performing their functions the report broadly noted how reports seldom had any formal impact on policy decisions. Indeed, as scholars have noted, the situation for committees may even have been better before the 1985 reforms, when committees could not set their own agenda.³⁰ According to this line of thinking, ministers would propose direct and focussed ideas for the committees to flush out would therefore play close attention to the committee’s final

report because the recommendation would help guide uncertain areas of government policy. Furthermore, as the committee report indicates, members of committees would feel positively about their role in helping guide policy formulation because they felt as though they were involved and that their efforts were being taken seriously.³¹ Veritably, this is an ever-exacerbating theme in Canadian legislative studies that must be remedied if an open dialogue is ever to exist on Canadian foreign policy.

Indeed, procuring and sustaining a substantive parliamentary dialogue on Canadian external policy amounts, in many ways, to nothing more than the will to withstand some degree of parliamentary reform. As Docherty indicates, standing order should require detailed responses from ministers when committees report. Much frustration has been spawned by committee members who worked tirelessly on a report, only to see it quickly shelved with little or no response from the minister.³² In this respect, one need not look further than the Trudeau government's ignorance of the Defence Committee's 1969 report on the matter of reducing Canada's military presence in Europe or the Chrétien government bypassing the Defence Committee in 2001 on the issue of funding for the Armed Forces, increasingly engaged in the war on terrorism as prime examples of detailed policy recommendations being quickly set aside.³³ Undoubtedly, such is a practise which cannot be tolerated in an era of democratized policy decision-making and dialogue which must be rectified. A possible solution to such malaise could be to have committee reports or recommendations on foreign policy, or other areas of study, take the form of draft legislation. This practise would circumvent the possibility for committee study to be shelved with token regard; rather, recommendations would have to be debated further in the legislature. Such developments and debates could only help to enhance the level of dialogue on foreign policy between members in the House, and equally, could attract the ire of the media to help promote further discussion within civil society, thereby making such issues register with the electorate. In its most simple analysis, fostering this overarching sense of dialogue in committees could have the greater effect of helping to build cross-party support and a national consensus for Canada's external affairs policy, which has been sorely lacking over the last few decades.

Arguably, committees are the most valuable asset in helping to formulate well thought-out policy decisions. Yet within the confines of the present parliamentary culture, the lack of dialogue on issues affecting Canada's global interests is striking and wholeheartedly disappointing. As veteran journalist Jeffrey Simpson has noted, parliamentary bodies are nothing more than "a talking shop. Their deliberative functions long ago atrophied; their legislative function is highly scripted . . . a form of organized intellectual mendacity."³⁴ Ultimately, if Parliament and specifically, committees are ever to evolve beyond the point of legislative handmaiden, a fundamental rethinking of their roles must be undertaken. In many other Western legislatures, committees are accorded far greater powers than in Canada. In Germany, for example, committee membership is determined by consensus decision of a special council of MPs in the Lower House. Moreover, members of committees are often experts in particular subject areas and, as such, exercise considerable influence in promoting dialogue with the executive in amending government bills.³⁵ This increased sense of importance is equally the case in other legislatures, such as in Norway, Italy and even Australia. While limitations caused by the nature of the Westminster system would naturally limit Canada's ability to consider such a vast paradigm shift of power, there is no obvious reason preventing MPs

from having their voices heard. Problems such as the continual shifting and turnover in membership in House of Commons committees, ranging anywhere from 65 to 70 per cent over the life of Parliament³⁶ is a clear affront to the promotion of dialogue between parliamentarians and the current locus of executive power. This is in stark contrast to other Westminster-based systems, namely Britain or Australia, whereby turnover ranges between 10 to 20 per cent.³⁷ As the Liaison Committee Report noted:

“Compared to many other legislatures, where committee members have greater security of tenure, this practice of substantial change in committee membership mid-way through a Parliament inevitably means that Canadian members lack the acquired background and the institutional memory that contribute greatly to the quality of committee work”³⁸

While committees indubitably possess the theoretical potential to cultivate this necessary dialogue on Canada’s external affairs, clearly, the limitations and restrictions that are imposed on them merely reinforce the power of the executive. While party discipline is no doubt an important consideration in this matter, it is peculiar as to why many parliamentarians have not been more vociferous in the demand that more tangible reforms be undertaken so that their membership on, and ideas emanating from, committees pertaining to foreign policy attract a greater ire of the public’s attention. While Docherty³⁹ and numerous other scholars have devoted volumes to the orientation of parliamentarians to their constituencies, it should be duly noted that within a post cold-war environment, many of the issues which constitute foreign affairs are increasingly more ‘domestic’ than the ‘high’ policy issues of yesteryear. As such, these issues—in particular those involving Canada-U.S or international trade and the numerous jobs associated with them—have an increased bearing on the livelihood of citizens. As the Special Joint Committee pointed out:

“International trade rules now have a direct impact on labour, the environment and other domestic framework policies....at the same time, in a world where prosperity is increasingly a function of expanding trade, foreign policy will be driven more than ever by the domestic demand for a better, freer and fairer international trade environment.”⁴⁰

Indeed, in many respects, the traditional distinction between foreign and domestic policy implies a hard and fast dividing line that arguably no longer exists.⁴¹ In an open society, the interests and concerns of everyone as a whole must be reflected in foreign policy. Through the process of allowing more input into the shaping of ‘low’ policy through avenues of ‘democratic’ parliamentary dialogue and the practise of wider consultation on how foreign policy decisions will impact individual communities would be highly beneficial in formulating decisions that are responsive to local concerns. This is particularly important given the increasingly multicultural composition of Canada, with its adopted citizenry who maintain affinities for their homeland and beyond Canada’s borders. Lastly, the promotion of an increased parliamentary dialogue could have the trickle down effect of helping build a national consciousness regarding international affairs with an engaged legislature which looks beyond its own boundaries and maintains a national interest.⁴² This fundamental shift in parliamentary culture would, in turn, have a reciprocal effect of overcoming the current fragmented focus and spawning a renewed

vigour and spirit for internationalism, thereby helping Canada to begin retracing its lost place in world affairs.

RECONCILING PARLIAMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTORS IN FOREIGN POLICY REVIEW

In commenting on the landscape of Canada's foreign affairs in 2005, Globe and Mail columnist Hugh Winsor lamented that Canada's Foreign Service has frequently "failed to engage, to explain, to dialogue [with Parliament] on world issues and how they relate to Canadian interests."⁴³ Further, he reinforced that the building of such a dialogue should include Parliament in speaking for citizens across the country. Indeed, this clear declaration with respect to rethinking and advancing parliamentary roles recapitulates much of the argumentation throughout this work, in that aside from a few examples, there has been significant historical and institutional shortcomings towards engaging parliament in formal dialogue or participatory policy analysis that is taken seriously in decision-making.⁴⁴

As many scholars have noted, with Schmitz and Lee chief among them,⁴⁵ the role of Parliament in the formal review of foreign policy has historically existed on precarious ground. While the Trudeau and Mulroney years offered few advances in terms of Parliamentary dialogue on the subject, one of the hallmarks of the Chrétien government, as previously noted, was the democratization and opening up of the foreign policy process.⁴⁶ While the 1993 Red Book commitment was a symbolic advance for the consideration of parliament in decision-making and building a more democratic foreign policy, as we have noted, a by-product of this move was also to raise the level of input from non-governmental actors into the policy process. Few will doubt the value of incorporating non-governmental organizations as consultants into the formal process of review. In many ways NGOs can appeal to broad public interest on foreign policy questions to help foster a more attentive foreign policy public. The problem with allocating extended powers to NGOs within formal review of foreign policy, however, is that, in many ways, it allows the bureaucracy to argue that there is an alternative to Parliament in gauging and understanding public opinion.⁴⁷ The end result of this political gamesmanship is that Parliament's voice can become highly diluted, if not superseded.

A good example of this theory played itself out at the first National Forum on Canadian Foreign Policy in 1994. Despite the fact that the Forum was intended to include representatives of Parliament, non-governmental organizations, and members of the general public,⁴⁸ MPs were initially not invited to attend. As English notes, the chair of the Review, Jean Robert Gauthier, complained loudly about such a glaring omission. Despite his vociferous opposition, at some sessions, parliamentarians were not permitted to speak. Furthermore, at one session, the MPs all took seats at the back of the room while other members of NGOs and academics took seats at the main table. Before the meeting started, someone in attendance quietly approached the chair and asked: 'Who are those people at the back?' The chair replied: "They are members of Parliament."⁴⁹ Indubitably, NGOs do have a role to play in contributing, even focussing, an increased dialogue on Canadian foreign policy. Nevertheless, as echoed in many of the overarching themes of this work, the supremacy of Parliamentary views in foreign policy and policy-making cannot be ignored and must reign supreme. Indeed, in order to reconcile the rise

in power of NGOs, and thereby affirm parliamentarians to their rightful place as the formal agents of the foreign policy process, formal dialogue must exist not only amongst representatives in the House but must equally exist between parliamentarians and their constituents. In this way, parliamentarians would usurp NGOs as the ‘grassroots’ actors who are on the trigger of public opinion. By extension, a corollary of this consultation process within the constituency would allow for parliamentarians to help provoke an interest in foreign policy questions amongst the citizenry. Indeed, the 2003 *Dialogue on Foreign Policy: Report to Canadians* had quite innovative dimensions and allowed for ordinary citizens to dialogue and voice their concerns with the minister and other parliamentarians. As well, MPs were invited to submit reports of constituency meetings held on how to better Canada’s foreign policy—many of which served as the prelude to the International Policy Review under the Martin government.⁵⁰

Nearly a year after the *Dialogue* was published the Martin government was clearly determined to increase the formal dialogue between Parliament and ordinary Canadians. The measures to increase this dialogue were clearly enunciated in the February 2004 Speech from the Throne, which announced that the International Policy Review, “will be considered by a parliamentary committee, where Canadians will have an opportunity to make their views known.” Moreover, the Liberal platform referred specifically to parliamentarians and ordinary Canadians having “the opportunity to debate its analysis and implications.”⁵¹ While the resulting minority parliament and election campaign did sidetrack the IPR and transformed it from a review into a longer International Policy Statement, the end result, in terms of promoting a direct dialogue amongst MPs and ordinary Canadians, despite the clamouring of NGOs, was quite effective. The IPS promised to increase accountability and dialogue amongst parliamentarians in international affairs, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs tabling annual foreign policy updates for discussion in the House, as well as increased consultation with ordinary Canadians to help foster an overarching interest in international affairs amongst voters.⁵²

Veritably, many promises have been made and only the test of history will permit a further examination of how such ground-work has contributed towards empowering parliamentarians to fulfill their agency role. Nevertheless, given the historical restrictions, such recent commitments towards increasing parliament’s place in foreign policy decision-making are an important first step. Moreover, such deliberations reinforce the fact that there is merit stimulating debate on foreign policy issues through increased parliamentary outreach and dialogue with citizens, which can be achieved without affording overly extended powers to non-governmental actors. In fostering and engaging in this dialogue, parliamentarians are clearly better served in exercising their role as representatives. Even more important, by bringing debates out from the back rooms of the PMO and into the legislature, this serves to remove the veil of ignorance in the foreign policy realm. In many ways, the process of increasing dialogue amongst representatives, empowered by community engagement, could help spark the fundamental rethinking of parliamentary roles that is necessary to reorient parliamentarians to questions of Canada’s place in the world, thereby precipitating new ideas and energy for a renewal of foreign policy deliberation in Canada.

CONCLUSION

From an institutional perspective, the fundamental rethinking of Parliamentary roles and dialogue in the shaping the foreign policy process challenges many doctrines in the history Canadian political thought. Yet as we have seen, there are substantial arguments to be made in favour of changing the culture of Parliament and its executive domination in foreign policy by increasingly allowing parliamentarians, whether in formal debates or particularly in committees, to establish an increased dialogue with the locus of power. Still, there is much unfinished business if parliamentarians, empowered by the diversity of viewpoints in their constituencies, are going to be incorporated into the locus of power. Despite some of the hopeful promises made--and positive groundwork laid for advances--by the Chrétien and Martin governments to increase foreign policy dialogue, it will no doubt take more than high-minded statements of intent every decade or so in order to define the appropriate, and feasible, roles for Canada's Parliament and its members.⁵³ Indeed, there are still many formal and institutional constraints which must be addressed. The overarching powers of the prime minister, the meandering of the bureaucracy, the lack of strong, coherent debate, and even more important, the precarious nature of shifting membership of the Committees on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the accompanying absence of attention paid to important committee reports are just a few topical examples which are inherently prohibitive to maintaining a sustained and open foreign policy dialogue in the legislature amongst elected officials.

Looking to the future, there is little doubt that within the confines of a progressively globalized world, foreign policy decisions will increasingly have an impact on Canadians day-to-day lives. Thus, in order to be able to make meaningful contributions, Canada will need a more creative and practical foreign policy ideas. Truthfully, the central challenge for future parliaments will be to determine how to foster increased engagement and dialogue amongst members through the channels government to craft and implement difficult foreign policy decisions. To begin answering such a challenge, one could suggest going back to the future in adopting what former minister Lloyd Axworthy suggested to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in the spring of 1996. He urged that parliamentary roles be advanced as part of a more regular and rigorous foreign policy review process, whereby the committee would conduct an annual publicly review the government's foreign policy priorities.⁵⁴ Indeed, such a process would, in theory, procure debate to ensure that Canada's foreign policy priorities remain in order, and thereby foster increased scrutiny, dialogue and engagement with foreign policy matters amongst more parliamentarians.

In its totality, if increased *meaningful* discussion of foreign affairs and Canada's place in the world is ever to take hold, a fundamental rethinking of the roles of parliamentarians must be undertaken. Parallel to the marked shift in the place of members is a paradigm shift in the culture of Canada's Parliament. The institution of Parliament needs to become more open and welcoming to MPs by listening and taking account for their views and the ideas obtained in consultation with their constituents and discussing pending international challenges in a serious manner. Given the converging nature of foreign and domestic policy, MPs need to be included and have a valuable say in the decision making process. To deny parliamentarians this opportunity, is to promote nothing more than symbolic and ephemeral representation in government.

Endnotes

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