

Summary Report

Minister Graham's Townhall Meetings

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Saint John, New Brunswick

March 4th and 5th , 2003

Immediately following the Townhall in St. John's, Newfoundland (see the Report on the Minister's Townhall Meeting in St. John's, March 6, 2003), the Hon. Bill Graham, Minister of Foreign Affairs, held community Townhall meetings in all three Maritime provinces. All three had standing room only/overflow room attendance. On the afternoon of March 4th, the University of Prince Edward Island hosted the Townhall in Charlottetown, with Roger Younker of CBC Radio as moderator. Approximately 200-220 people attended. On the evening of March 4th, the Minister held a Townhall in Halifax, hosted by St. Mary's University with Don Connolly of CBC Radio as moderator. Panellists Dr. Edna Keeble of St. Mary's University, Neville Gilfoy of Progress Magazine and President-elect of the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, and Dr. Dennis Stairs of Dalhousie University briefly presented introductory views on the Security, Prosperity, and Culture and Values pillars (respectively). The final Townhall of the tour, held in Saint John on March 5th, was hosted by the University of New Brunswick Saint John and moderated by Anne-Marie McGrath. Approximately 150 people attended. At each Townhall, both the Minister and the moderators urged people to also participate in the Foreign Policy Dialogue through the web site.

Many common issues were raised at each of the three Townhalls. These common themes are summarized below. Issues that were raised at only one Townhall are addressed at the end under the individual Townhall headings. Please note that individual summaries (public versions) for each Townhall will soon be posted in both official languages on the Foreign Policy Dialogue web site (www.foreign-policy-dialogue.ca or www.dialogue-politique-etrangere.ca).

Summary of Common Themes

Security

As with previous Townhalls, the impending **war with Iraq** was the dominant topic of discussion. There was a strong anti-war sentiment expressed at all of the Townhalls. In Charlottetown, the Minister stopped to talk to a small group (of about 15) anti-war protestors assembled outside the Townhall auditorium. In Halifax, one participant held a "No War" sign in the auditorium as he listened to the discussions. In Saint John, participants were offered "No War in Iraq" buttons. A group of children from New Brunswick's Salisbury United Church expressed their concern for the world they will inherit, and presented the Minister with bags of rice "to feed enemies, not wage war against them." At all events, clapping and cheering greeted contributions that opposed war.

Many participants expressed concern that **Canada is being pressured to support (and join) the U.S.** in an (illegal and immoral) war against Iraq for fear of **economic reprisals** if we fail to do so. In both economic and military terms, Canada is becoming increasingly integrated with the U.S., to the extent that some fear that bilateral relations with the U.S. will cause Canada to

abandon its traditional “Middle Power,” peacekeeping, and multilateral approaches to international relations. Many participants stressed that Canada must maintain an **independent foreign policy** distinct from that of the U.S. In particular, participants emphasized that Canada’s foreign policy should focus on negotiation, mediation, and peacekeeping, and should promote human rights, good governance, conflict resolution and basic freedoms for all people. Some wanted to know **how Canada could influence the U.S. position** to dissuade Washington from war. Finally, participants wanted to know what **Canada’s position would be if the Security Council does not authorize a war**.

Minister Graham stated that Canada will not influence the U.S. simply by doing what the Americans want us to do. He disagreed with the notion that our participation (or not) in the war would have economic or trade repercussions, noting that Canada and the U.S. have disagreed before on foreign policy issues (eg: the war in Vietnam) and have still maintained friendly relations and a successful trade partnership. He further argued that problems over the Wheat Board, softwood lumber, and agricultural subsidies would not disappear if we were to support the U.S. if it is not in our interest to do so. Trade disputes will be resolved through trade negotiations.

In terms of influencing the U.S. position, the Minister stated that Canada does have leverage (albeit perhaps indirect leverage) on the U.S. position by grace of the respect we have earned around the world and our influence at the UN. There are a diversity of views and voices in the U.S., with many sympathetic people (such as Colin Powell) with whom we can work. Minister Graham noted that both he and the Prime Minister have repeatedly conveyed the message that it is in the U.S.’s own interest to stay within the multilateral system. The Minister argued that the U.S.’s show of force should be recognized as exerting the pressure required to get Saddam Hussein to begin disarming. Diplomacy, he noted, sometimes must be backed up by the threat of force. Finally, he stated that if there is Security Council authorization for military action against Iraq, Canada will support UN action: “if there is a UN-mandated operation, Canada will be there.”

A number of participants were concerned about the **consequences of war**, especially the **human toll** on Iraqi civilians. While someone in Halifax voiced concern about the effect of existing **sanctions** on the Iraqi populations, participants at each Townhall wanted to know what Canada is doing, or plans to do, to address the humanitarian situation that will exist both during and after a war in Iraq. One participant in Saint John wanted to know what Canada is doing to protect the humanitarian rights of prisoners of war, citing the example of the prisoners held at Guantanamo as examples of how the U.S. has failed to honour the Geneva Conventions and to respect the human rights of prisoners. Another aspect of the consequences of war was the question of the **consequences for George Bush** if the U.S. were to act unilaterally without UN Security Council authorization in an illegal war. *The Minister observed that such unilateral action would undermine the UN, marginalize the Security Council and its governance role, and would pose a risk to the international system.*

In both Charlottetown and Halifax, participants wanted to know whether Canada was already involved in a war without Security Council authorization (and hence in violation of international law) due to the fact that **Canadian warships** have been sent to the Persian Gulf (both the HMCS Iroquois and the HMCS Fredericton left Halifax for the Gulf the morning of March 5th, 2003). *The Minister noted that the ships are going to the region to provide support for Canadian action in Afghanistan.*

There was strong opinion voiced that a war with Iraq is not just about weapons of mass

destruction, the violation of Security Council resolutions, nor the suffering of the Iraqi people (Iraq, one participant noted, is not at the top of the list of oppressing its people). In both Halifax and Saint John, **Israel** was singled out as a country that has repeatedly **violated Security Council resolutions** with impunity. Participants at both the Halifax and Saint John Townhalls said that the Muslim World sees this special treatment of Israel as a double standard and hypocrisy (this sentiment was very strongly expressed at the Halifax Townhall). These participants felt that enforcement of Security Council resolutions should be applied uniformly. Participants noted that addressing and resolving the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** would go a long way towards solving problems in the Middle East. North Korea and West Africa were other regions identified as areas that contain some of the same apparent conditions for a pre-emptive war/intervention. In both Charlottetown and Saint John, participants wanted to know what Canada is doing to ensure a peaceful resolution to the situation in **North Korea** to prevent a repeat of the situation we currently face with Iraq. *Minister Graham agreed that there is a tremendous need for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, he noted that while Canada has been working towards promoting resolution of the conflict, a solution cannot be imposed, but must be reached by the conflicting parties. The Minister stated that he, too, is concerned about North Korea, and that is why Canada has opened diplomatic relations (through our embassy in Beijing) with the North Koreans. Canada is trying to persuade North Korea that the best way to solve their problems is by working through the international community. Further, Maurice Strong, a prominent Canadian, is working with the UN to try to address the humanitarian crisis in the country.*

In Charlottetown, one participant felt that the public and politicians/the government were disconnected from what Canada's **Armed Forces** are doing. In Saint John, Eslie Wayne, M.P. (Saint John) called for more money for the armed forces, although another participant felt any increase should be used for peacekeeping, peace-building, infrastructure, and education. The Minister highlighted the Forces' proud tradition of peacekeeping, and told of his experience travelling in Bosnia where he personally heard the appreciation of local communities for the Canadian approach to peacekeeping.

Another common theme was the need to address **root causes** of instability, insecurity, and terrorism. In Saint John, a participant argued that there is a direct link between U.S. policies and terrorism, and feared that should Canada resort to "warmongering," we too could experience terrorism on our soil. All Townhalls included recommendations to put more money into Third World development and poverty eradication, and to help ensure universal access to food, clean water, shelter, and meaningful work. (The issue of foreign aid, which was largely raised in the discussions on the Prosperity Pillar, is summarized in the next section). *The Minister agreed that conditions of poverty, huge income disparity, and discontent provide a breeding ground for terrorism. He noted that the Prime Minister has also expressed similar views.*

Finally, in both Charlottetown and Halifax, participants opposed (what they viewed as) **racial profiling** in Canada. *The Minister responded that, while the Solicitor General and the Minister of Immigration would be better able to respond to this issue, he himself was not aware of any racial profiling in Canada. He noted that Bill C-36 was a response to the need to ensure the security of Canadians, and that the Charter protects against abuse. Furthermore, Canada has told the U.S. that it believes racial profiling is not in the U.S.' long-term interest.*

Prosperity

In both Charlottetown and Halifax, participants noted that prosperity should not be defined

as economic prosperity alone, and should not be equated with consumerism. Instead, prosperity should be thought of as having a stable world in which to live, a good quality of life, access to food, water, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work. There were calls for Canada to **increase foreign aid** to meet the 0.7% of GDP goal. *Minister Graham agreed that Canada's foreign aid was too low, and for this reason foreign aid will be increased by 8% per year (and will double in 10 years). Further, he noted that Canada is trying to advance the development agenda of African countries through NEPAD, and through foreign aid that promotes good governance. Finally, Canada has reduced tariffs and opened its markets to products of the thirty poorest developing countries.*

In Charlottetown and Halifax (and much less so in Saint John), much of the discussion on prosperity focussed on the **impact that globalization, neoliberal trade agreements**, and the expansion of trade relations with developing countries has in terms of enriching transnational corporations at the expense of the developing countries. One participant felt Canada had lost its independence because of trade agreements, and another expressed the view that NAFTA has been bad for Canada. Participants also voiced concern about the impact of such trade on **human rights** and the **environment**, and in promoting unfair wages and the use of child labour. In Halifax, a participant wanted to know how we could ensure that trade agreements (including the Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection) promote fair trade and do not abuse human rights or degrade the environment. *The Minister noted that, as an example of a changing approach by government, the Quebec Summit of the Americas was not just about trade, but about building better societies in Latin America by focussing on human rights issues, labour rights, health care and other such issues. Similarly, the Doha round of WTO negotiations is now being called the development round precisely because it addresses such development concerns. He said that Canada has been working with Canadian corporations to promote good corporate behaviour abroad and corporate (social) responsibility.*

Culture and Values

Much of the discussion of values was raised under the issue of security, where participants highlighted the **values** that Canadians place in **multilateralism**, promoting human decency, **human rights**, **democracy**, **human security**, **good governance**, peace-building. The issue of using **international student exchanges** to act as ambassadors for Canadian values was raised in both Charlottetown and Halifax. In Saint John, however, one participant cautioned that some Arab countries were exporting students to Canada to act as recruiters. Consequently, he stated that Canada needs to distinguish between legitimate students and such 'agents provocateurs.' *The Minister pointed out the benefits of sharing Canada's federal model and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms with others.*

One participant in Halifax felt that **culture and arts** were not emphasized enough in current foreign policy.

Other issues Raised at Charlottetown Townhall

- The war in Iraq is about oil, and Canada should do much more to promote and support the development and use of renewable energy.
- There was a fair amount of discussion about (the failures or limitations of) Canadian

foreign aid. One participant felt foreign aid is too tied to Canadian interests. Another criticized a perceived shift in CIDA priorities from meeting peoples' basic human needs to promoting investment in private partnerships. NEPAD was criticized for opening Africa to a dangerous market mentality, consumerism, and to privatization. (*The Minister did not believe this assessment of CIDA's priorities was correct, but said that if the participant follows up with his office, he will ensure that she gets a full answer from CIDA*).

- Someone suggested that foreign policy commitments, including the foreign aid budget, should become constitutional commitments so that such commitments could not be overridden by changes of political parties in government.

Other issues Raised at Halifax Townhall

Introductory Views on the Three Pillars:

1. Security: Dr. Edna Keeble, St. Mary's University:

In contrasting Canada's approach to security with that of the U.S., Dr. Keeble observed that while Canada builds on a sense of working with the like minded, focusses on addressing the root causes of conflicts (such as economic marginalization) and cares about the global (not just national) good, the U.S. will work with a coalition of the willing - if they are there, but otherwise it will go it alone. The U.S. demonstrates unilateralist, exceptionalist tendencies, and is willing to use military force for national ends and to make preemptive strikes.

2. Prosperity: Neville Gilfoy, Progress Magazine and President-elect of the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Gilfoy reminded the audience of the great economic importance of Canadian exports to the U.S. The close economic integration between the two countries means that the Prime Minister needs to be an effective relationship builder. He emphasized that Canada needs to be seen as the U.S.' most influential and trusted advisor, and we need to gain more influence in Washington so that we can have greater influence on the direction of U.S. policies. Further, we need to show Canada as a tolerant, resource-rich country laden with opportunity, that is attractive to immigration.

3. Values and Culture: Dr. Dennis Stairs, Dalhousie University.

Dr. Stairs questioned whether Canada's foreign policy ought to ensure that Canadian intellectual, academic and cultural achievements are exported, and noted the decline in funding for this aspect of our foreign policy. He also noted that foreign aid, a manifestation of our values, has (until recently) been subject to repeated funding cuts. He (wryly) observed that while Canadians seem to think that their foreign policy should be a manifestation of Canadian values, this implies that other countries do not pursue a foreign policy based on values, but rather on something base like interests.

Participant Contributions:

- Having influence in the world requires a commitment of resources.
- Why doesn't DFAIT publish its weapons sales to the U.S. (since it publishes weapons sales to other countries)?
- One participant expressed the view that the U.S. conveniently ignored the OAS democracy clause and hence did not believe that the attempted August coup in Venezuela was illegal. The participant concluded that the OAS democracy clause is merely a "club with which to

- beat Cuba.”
- Debt repayment by developing countries is three times the amount these countries receive in foreign aid, highlighting the need for debt forgiveness. One participant wanted to know why, with the recent \$100 million payment to six African countries, none went to Eritrea? (*The Minister, who believed there was a program in place, said he would check on this issue*).
 - One participant expressed the opinion that no one listens to public input to the Dialogue input, but rather that decisions are made by executives behind closed doors.

Other issues Raised at Saint John Townhall

- One participant did not agree with the March 28th deadline that Canada set in its proposal to the UN Security Council, feeling that the imposition of such a short time frame simply “fuels the fire.”
- The President of the Canadian Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce said Canada needs to embrace immigration as the solution to prosperity, and should help Iraq’s neighbours to help stabilize the area.
- One participant felt that Canada’s trade was too dependent on the U.S., and that efforts should be made to expand trade with countries in the South in a fair and equitable way.

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