# THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY SECURITY: OBAMA AND HARPER HAVE DIFFERENT TAKES

Gordon McBean

The environmental is closely linked to the economy and global security, the two other main items on the Canada-US agenda, argues Gordon McBean, one of Canada's eminent authorities on climate change. While President Obama proposes a cap-and-trade system to reduce GHG emissions, Prime Minister Harper is focused on clean energy technology. Obama has also put together a very high-powered team, and prioritized climate change in his budget. Canada risks being left behind by the United States.

L'environnement est étroitement lié à l'économie et à la sécurité internationale, deux points majeurs de l'ordre du jour canado-américain, affirme Gordon McBean, réputé spécialiste canadien en matière de changements climatiques. Tandis que Barack Obama propose un système de plafond et d'échange pour réduire les émissions de GES, Stephen Harper s'en tient aux technologies d'énergie propre. Mais le président américain ayant déjà rassemblé une équipe de haut niveau et fait de la lutte contre les changements climatiques une priorité budgétaire, le Canada pourrait bientôt accuser un retard difficile à surmonter face aux États-Unis.

Barack Obama's visit to Canada, his first foreign stop as president of the United States, had great significance for Canada-US relations. President Obama and Prime Minister Stephen Harper discussed a wide range of issues. In their joint news conference at the conclusion of the visit, they focused on three issues: the global economic recession; cross-border cooperation on environmental protection and energy security; and priorities for international peace and security. The second issue is my focus here but I will argue that the three are and should be linked, as both key issues and policy responses. A major concern is that their interdependence is not recognized.

This meeting was especially important in light of the fact that United States and Canadian policies will be of utmost importance for the 15th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Additionally, as President Obama notes, climate change is "an issue that, ultimately, the Prime Minister's children and my children are going to have to live with for many years," an issue with national and international consequences. The Copenhagen meeting has been tasked with developing the post-Kyoto Protocol agreement that will address the reduction of greenhouse gases to hopefully avoid dangerous human interference with the climate system.

Given the consistent information coming from the scientific community, a solid and positive US and Canadian policy is especially important. The International Scientific Congress on Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges & Decisions, attended by more than 2,500 delegates from nearly 80 countries, which ended on March 12, in Copenhagen, for example, stated: "Temperature rises above 2°C [referenced to pre-industrial temperatures, which means only 1.4°C more warming] will be very difficult for contemporary societies to cope with, and will increase the level of climate disruption through the rest of the century." The *Financial Times* editorial of March 14, entitled "Global Warning — Fighting Climate Cange has Never Been More Important," went on to say, "Do not be misled by the recent cold winter in Europe and North America — or by this week's conference of vocal sceptics in New York [one national newspaper in Canada did a disservice to its readers by highlighting the misinformation from these skeptics]. Pay attention instead to the larger gathering in Copenhagen, where mainstream scientists issued a series of dire warnings that global warming is proceeding far faster than the scenarios published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change two years ago."

In their joint news conference, Prime Minister Harper noted, "President Obama and I agreed to a new initiative that will further cross-border cooperation on environmental protec-

tion and energy security. We are establishing a US-Canada clean energy dialogue which commits senior officials from both countries to collaborate on the development of clean energy science and technologies that will reduce greenhouse gases and combat climate change."

While it is encouraging to see some progress in this realm, it is disappointing that the "only thing Stephen Harper committed to today is holding talks on technology research and pilot projects," as noted by Matthew Bramley, director of the Pembina Institute's climate change program. To deal with climate change, the Canadian government is putting most of its faith in carbon capture and storage, a strategy also endorsed by the United States. Most of Canada's investments in climate science in the past two years have been devoted to this issue. Given this commitment, it is recommended that leaders read the recent *Economist* briefing entitled "Carbon Capture and Storage — Trouble in Store," which explores the problem areas related to this issue, including the cost, with present estimates of $40-$90 per tonne of emissions reductions, possibly lowering to $35-$60 per tonne some time after 2030 with advances in technology and large-scale deployment. The *Economist*'s briefing ends, "For the moment, at least, CCS is mostly hot air." If there is uncertainty, this must be taken seriously since misguided policies could prove to be disastrous.

In view of this, should we not be investigating other alternatives more aggressively? Reductions in energy use, the conservation approach and use of renewable energy sources would allow Canada and the US to reduce their current heavy dependence on fossil-fuel-based energy. It is worrisome that the Canadian approach to the economic recession stresses investments in "shovel-ready" projects, which allows for little innovation and forward thinking. By comparison, President Obama's stimulus package focuses heavily on renewable energy and energy efficiency, outspending Canada in these areas by six to one, on a per capita basis.

Presently, the US and Canadian emission reduction targets for 2020 are similar (0 percent for the US and -3 percent for Canada), adjusted to the 1990 reference year. The December 2008 report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development noted, with respect to Turning the Corner (a plan to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants), that the "federal government cannot demonstrate that the results it has reported for the policy tools we examined have actually been achieved or that processes are in place to verify the results reported by the private sector." The commissioner also reported on "flawed" analyses with respect to emission reductions. The credibility of emission reduction plans depends in part on the validity of the economic forecasts that go into them, particularly for intensity-based targets, and these have been criticized. Overall these reports do not give confidence that targets will actually be achieved.

Despite discussions of harmonizing US and Canadian strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Prime Minister seems still to be focusing on clean energy technology while President Obama is speaking of a cap and trade system. It is unclear at this time how synchronized the two strategies will be.

The US plan could build on the successful state initiatives like the Western Climate Initiative, led by western US states and including the provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Additionally, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, when announcing his green energy bill, noted that "carbon pricing is coming to North America just as surely as night follows day. This will likely be driven by President Obama through a cap-and-trade program." With British Columbia and Quebec already having carbon taxes, the federal government needs to be looking at a wide range of possibilities.

As long as President George W. Bush was in power, Canada could perhaps legitimately argue that it was really premature to talk about harmonization with the United States, as the Prime Minister stated in the news conference. However, since as early as 2008 it was apparent that the US climate change policy would be significantly different in the future, as all three presidential candidates, John McCain, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, spoke about taking action on climate change. The opportunity to have a made-in-Canada climate policy in anticipation of these events was there but the opportunity was lost and Canada's current plan seems to be very reactive.

In view of the strength of the US team on climate change, we may be better off. The appointments of Carol Browner as energy and climate change "czarina," John Holdren as scientific adviser, Steven Chu as secretary of energy and Jane Lubchenco as head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, with its new budgetary resources to undertake climate research, make most Canadian climate scientists look south in envy. On March 9, just over two weeks after visiting Ottawa, President Obama issued a memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies, stating, "Science and the scientific process must inform and guide decisions of my Administration on a wide range of issues, including improvement of public health, protection of the environment, increased

efficiency in the use of energy and other resources, mitigation of the threat of climate change, and protection of national security." In this case, science needs to be interpreted to include the socio-economic sciences and goes well beyond technology. The President's proposed 2010 budget includes significant increases for science funding for better weather forecasting and climate data, as well as climate research. In addition, President Obama's memorandum unequivocally signals the importance that he places on scientific integrity in federal policy-making and calls for the elimination of political interference in science, ensuring that scientific data are never distorted or concealed and that scientific decisions are based on facts. The scientific community in Canada would welcome such openness and elevation of the role of scientific information.

The months leading to the Copenhagen meeting will be very important for both countries and the global community. Additionally, the President spoke about his hope "that we can show leadership so that by the time the international conference takes place in Copenhagen that the United States has shown itself committed and ready to do its part." He has the team in place and the stated commitments to make us optimistic. He also called on Canada to display similar leadership. This will necessitate a marked change from Canada's positioning in the last two Conferences of the Parties, where Canada had the dubious honour of being awarded the largest number of "fossil" awards, bestowed by non-governmental climate organizations for actions that retard progress.

Although the third topic of discussion at the Obama-Harper meeting concerning international peace and security focused on Afghanistan or border security, it is important to also address climate change in that context. The Norwegian Nobel Committee, in awarding the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, stated that it is "necessary to protect the world's future climate, and thereby to reduce the threat to the security of mankind." In so doing, it placed climate change in the context of global peace and security.

The United Kingdom's national security strategy identified security challenges as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, transnational organized crime, global instability and conflict, failed and fragile states and civil emergencies. In their discussion of drivers of insecurity, climate change was specified as "potentially the greatest challenge to global stability and security and therefore to national security. Tackling its causes, mitigating its risks and preparing for and dealing with its consequences are critical to our future security, as well as protecting global prosperity and avoiding humanitarian disaster." Prime Minister Harper stated, "There is no such thing as a threat to the national security of the United States which does not represent a direct threat to this country." The US Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Center for a New American Security entitled their report "The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Global Climate Change" and concluded, among other things, that "a narrow interpretation of the term "national security" may be woefully inadequate to convey the ways in which state authorities might break down in a worst case climate change scenario." Given this interpretation of security, it is important that both Canada and the United States make climate change a focus of their security policies.

A key aspect of security is energy security, and in that context, the Alberta oil sands are a factor. Canada is the largest foreign supplier of energy to the US, and the output of the oil sands has been an increasing fraction of that energy. President Obama is well aware of both the Canadian oil sands and US coal and also the call for "clean" energy. At the present time, it is not clear how this relationship will evolve. Capturing carbon will need to be a part of the solution in the next decades, but there is a strong need for the development of parallel strategies and looking to the more distant future.

For the next few decades the climate will continue to warm due to the built-in inertia of the climate system and the inevitable further emissions of greenhouse gases, so that by mid-century we will have used up more than half the gap toward a 2°C warmer climate.

We need to adapt to that reality, and that means mainstreaming climate change into all our policy decisions. Since climate change matters, through weather and other factors on a day-to-day and longer time-scale basis, an informed decision-making process will factor in a changed climate and look for means to reduce vulnerability and gain benefits. This needs to be based on a strengthened scientific basis. We also need to be changing our energy mix so that we use this time to shift from climate-changing approaches to those that protect the climate as an invaluable resource that sustains the planet as we know it. The idea that one can emit into the atmosphere the by-products of our energy uses at no cost must be discarded; polluting costs and the polluters need to pay.

It is past time when only the factors for the next election should be driving policy. The leaders spoke about three issues: the recession; energy and climate change; and international peace and security. But they are not separate issues. We cannot have international peace and security if there is economic deprivation, whether that originates from failed banks and lack of regulation or from a changing climate decimating the economies of many countries. Our dedication to energy security in the form of fossil as opposed to renewable sources is a driver toward dangerous futures. The present economic recession is not the time to foreclose future options by short-sighted and siloed thinking, but a time to use the billions of dollars of economic stimulus to drive our society in a new direction.

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