

Is It Time for a War Cabinet?

As of Sunday March 9, the Liberal party will have a new leader and the country a new Prime Minister, preparing to form a new cabinet. But before that cabinet is formed, let's all just have a think...

Canada is at war. The country is facing an existential threat from our southern neighbour unlike anything we have faced since 1812.

The trade war may end tomorrow, or it may continue. But if it were to end tomorrow, we would still be faced with a hostile superpower which has lost its way. Until democratic norms are restored there, Canada must remain on guard for any new aggression from a wildly unpredictable U.S. administration.

With our adversary attempting to collapse the Canadian economy, this is not a time for politics as usual. The American tariffs will drive Canadian unemployment higher and the countervailing Canadian tariffs will elevate prices, eventually resulting in recession. This is not a time for bickering between political parties; not a time for the gamesmanship which always precedes a general election. We need the strength that comes from solidarity. We need Canadians united in opposition to the threat.

So, how to rein in parliament hill's usual discord, while preparing ourselves for the fight ahead? Might it be appropriate to set aside any thought of a general election, and unite parliament under either a national unity government (a coalition government, with representation from all parties) or an all-party war cabinet? (A committee of the full cabinet, often including civil servants, the military and members of opposition parties.)

During times of crisis, British Prime Ministers have frequently convened war cabinets: David Lloyd George during the Great War, Churchill during World War II, Margaret Thatcher in the Falklands War, John Major in the Gulf War and Tony Blair in the invasion of Afghanistan and the Iraq War.¹

Canadian Conservative Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden formed a coalition with the Liberals during the conscription crisis of the Great War². During WWII, Mackenzie King formed a Cabinet War Committee, which replaced the full cabinet as our primary decision-making body.³

If the trade war continues for many months, our economy is likely to slip into the stagflation we saw in the 1970's. Price and wage controls may again be needed. Canada, as energy colony to the U.S., may be forced into self-sufficiency.⁴ Some of our hard-won liberties may be temporarily suspended. If dissent becomes disorder, the Emergencies Act may have to be invoked. Canada will retain our sovereignty, but in the words of the PM, "This is going to be tough".

This is all a bit over the top, you say? A Stoic approach would be to prepare for the worst, while hoping for the best. Towards that end, the term "war" does have a way of concentrating the mind. We will need to mobilize resources and motivate action, quickly. This trade war should be led by a war cabinet.

Guy Talevi
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¹ BBC News (Oct. 9, 2001): "[War cabinets of the past](#)"

² J. Terry Copp, Britannica: "[Sir Robert Borden prime minister of Canada](#)"

³ Canadian War Museum: "[Canada and the War](#)"

⁴ Unpublished (Nov. 3, 2018): "[Canada Is An Energy Colony](#)"

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