

PM in Moscow: Symbolism or Substance?

Should we expect Brian Mulroney's visit to the Soviet Union to have a substantive impact on Canada-Soviet relations? Or is political symbolism the order of the day? In addressing this issue, three dimensions should be taken into account.

First, the visit could constitute an important learning process for the Prime Minister. After all, he can hardly be deemed knowledgeable on either the USSR or Soviet-related issues. First-hand observation and discussions with other Soviet leaders could assist Mr. Mulroney in focusing on important bilateral and multilateral issues which have not been addressed adequately by his government.

Second, bilateral relations may be strengthened in policy areas such as the environment, native peoples, science and technology, and the Arctic. Here the Prime Minister could add legitimacy to the ongoing normalization of relations. It should be noted that Canada has trailed its Western allies in responding to the changes in Soviet domestic and

security policy which have occurred under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Third, Mr. Mulroney could conclude that Canada should more seriously lend its support to the process of change within the USSR and should more actively advocate a positive response by the West to the changing strategic environment. Given the prevailing skepticism in Washington, the Canadian government could even attempt to convince our American friends that the Cold War is over. Such a posture would enhance the independence of Canadian policy vis-à-vis the Western Alliance at a time when the critics have focused on the lack of

Canadian leadership in foreign and security policy.

Should any or all of these result from the Mulroney visit, substantive steps will have been taken in the right direction and Canada's policies will be on a sounder footing. On the other hand, it is equally possible that little or nothing will have changed other than to divert Canadian media and public attention from the domestic problems which currently face the Progressive Conservative government. In the latter instance, political symbolism will once again have been deemed the norm.

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A Canada-USSR Business Council has been formed to promote commercial relations between the two countries. The choice of the two chairmen shows its importance to both sides. The Canadian is Albert Reichmann, president of the huge real estate firm Olympia & York Developments Ltd., and his Soviet counterpart is Vadim Efremov, vice-president of the USSR Chamber of Commerce and Industry. First results: a major Olympia & York office — apartment complex in Moscow.

Sovereignty: A Possible Option

Canada's proposal for a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) is dead in the water but the decision leaves in serious doubt our ability to support Arctic sovereignty. The Department of National Defence, in evaluating new conventional subs, should reconsider a homegrown option that might assuage most SSN concerns while giving us true under-ice capability.

Developed by ECS Group in Ottawa, this SSN employs a smaller reactor than those aboard SSNs to drive a closed-cycle Energy Conversion System for battery charging. ECS Group is positioned to capitalize on its perseverance through the "SSN or nothing" period, as Group President Gregg MacDonald puts it. "We're now technically three

years more advanced."

The consortium was founded in the early 1970s to capitalize on Canada's interest in Arctic hydrocarbons and concomitant sovereignty concerns. Concluding that small nuclear reactors of about 100KW output were the only practicable air-independent power source, ECS began conceptual studies of exploration submersibles (labelling them SSn). On the military side, DND felt 300-400KW of power was adequate, giving submarines virtually unlimited submerged endurance at 6 knots. Today, the AMPS1000 yields a base 12-14 knots submerged, the same as new conventional subs. Mr. MacDonald says endurance would be limited "only by the time you want to keep the crew down."

There is still the issue of shoreside facilities, pivotal in the SSN debate. A typical SSN would produce a waste-basket-sized spent fuel bundle thrice in a 30-year operational life. The key is public perception. A poll commissioned by ECS suggests Canadians are not against "nuclear" per se. "They were against using it in 'attack' submarines, for a purpose which was not consistent with Canadian policy," MacDonald explains. "When we asked them about our defensive system, we were very surprised that the public would be ready to accept it." An SSN is as "nuclear" as an SSN but if Canadians can be convinced of sovereignty requirements, ECS would be as confident of its future as Canada is of its claim to the Arctic. — KAP