

**BUREAU DE COORDINATION DES ÉTUDES**  
**Fiche d'identification de la mise à jour**

**COMMISSION :** Commission d'étude des questions afférentes à l'accession du Québec à la souveraineté.

**ÉTUDE ORIGINALE**

**Référence :** Volume 1, pages 647 à 652

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**Titre :** Déclaration d'ouverture (Exposé sur les relations internationales)

**MISE À JOUR**

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The conclusion I reached in my 1992 testimony remains valid today, namely, “la plupart des Américains comme notre gouvernement, souhaitent que le Canada demeure un pays uni. Il est de notre intérêt national de traiter avec un pays, un gouvernement souverain, un marché et un allié traditionnel connu. Mais si le Québec devait choisir la souveraineté, je crois que les Américains s’ajusteraient à cette réalité et amorceraient rapidement des relations étroites et amicales avec le Québec.” Still, at the time I assumed that independence, if it ever occurred, would come in the form of some kind of Canada-Quebec agreement.

To this day there remains no official U.S. policy as to how to react to Quebec sovereignty. Like most other countries, the U.S. makes important foreign policy decisions only when it has to. Moreover, not having any official policy has helped U.S. officialdom to remain unentangled in the debates within Quebec and the rest of Canada about the country’s future.

So thinking about what the U.S. would, in fact, do has to be based on U.S. interests. Strikingly, there is a good deal of potential tension between, on the one hand how the U.S. has to pursue those interests as long as Quebec has not taken the decisive step of moving towards independence, and on the other what it should do if Quebec ever were to take that step. Because Canadian unity is in the U.S. interest, its natural allies are Ottawa and Canadian federalists in general. It should have come as no surprise then when President Clinton forcefully underlined the merits of federal systems during his 1999 address at a conference on federalism convened by the Canadian government Mt. Tremblant. (It is worth observing, though that the president remained true to the longstanding policy of never directly entering the Quebec-Canada debate insofar as he never mentioned Quebec.)

But if Quebec were to become independent, it would be in the interest of the U.S. not only to pursue a close relationship with Quebec, but for Canada to maintain as close a relationship as possible with its former province. At that moment, in other words, Washington and New York would begin to share the point of Quebec City. To admit this now, however, would weaken the firm U.S. support of Canadian unity—hence the tension.

Nonetheless, how Quebec sought to become independent has also become a central issue. Since 1994, the Quebec government adopted the position that Quebec could become independent unilaterally and accede fairly readily to international treaties and other agreements to which Canada is now a signatory. This approach has produced a strong reaction in Washington and another in Ottawa which would affect the U.S. position.

During the 1995 referendum campaign, sovereignist leaders in effect took advantage of the official U.S. policy of non-interference in the Canadian debate. They claimed, in particular that Quebec could accede to the North American Free Trade (NAFTA) agreement

with a minimum of negotiation. This highly dubious claim provoked a significant change in the statements of U.S. officials. While still seeking to remain outside of the debates over Quebec's future, the U.S. has nonetheless made it clear that there would be no "automatic" accession of Quebec to NAFTA and other significant North American accords. There would have to be negotiations and in several cases —certainly including NAFTA—the approval of the U.S. Congress would have to be obtained. In other words, there has been a hardening of official U.S. utterances over the issue.

The other significant development has been the adopted in 2000 of the Clarity Act by the Canadian Parliament. To be sure, this has been a highly controversial piece of legislation within Canada. The Government of Quebec contests its constitutionality. Nonetheless, the act would, in all probability have an important impact on the approach Washington would take in the event of a Quebec declaration of independence challenged by the rest of the country. Because of its interests in the Canadian status quo and its natural alliance with Ottawa, Washington would be strongly disinclined to recognize Quebec as sovereign if the test of the Clarity Act were not met.

Quebeckers will, of course, recognize the irony: the United States, which itself became independent through the most famous unilateral declaration of independence in history, remains unreceptive to any other such declarations in its neighborhood.

February 2002

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