ENVISIONING A MORE POPULOUS, COMMANDING CANADA — IF IT SURVIVES

A CONVERSATION WITH IRVIN STUDIN

Irvin Studin is the President of the Toronto-based Institute for 21st Century Questions, and Editor-in-Chief & Publisher of *Global Brief* magazine. He has been called one of the leading international policy thinkers of his generation. Studin has been a professor in leading universities in North America, Asia and Europe. Studin is the co-founder of Ukraine's Higher School of Public Administration (Kiev). His latest book is *Russia – Strategy, Policy and Administration* (Palgrave-MacMillan, 2017), and his forthcoming book is *Ten Theses on Canada in the 21st Century*. He worked for a number of years in the Privy Council Office in Ottawa, as well as in the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Canberra. For years, he has argued that Canada should strive to become a country of 100 million people by the year 2100, kickstarting a national debate on the question. He spoke recently with *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens*.

Q: You've held out a compelling vision of Canada as a country of 100 million people by 2100. By 2067, depending on how things go, we'll have moved our population from the present 36 million to something closer to 100 million. How far do you think the country should be towards that goal, and why?

A: There are two ways of looking at the 100-million argument. And it's not set in stone — it could be 80 million or 120 million. If I had my druthers, we'd be well on our way in both respects: one is the metaphorical respect, which is just as important as the second, the policy respect. The metaphorical idea is that Canada begins to think, kinetically, like a country that's on its way toward 100 million – to think much bigger, much more capaciously, to develop a national imagination of itself as a major country that sets out, as a term-setter, to do major things for itself and also for the human condition — in what promises to be a much more complex century for us as a country. I should say just as a proviso that I hope we're around as a country in 2067. That's also not self-evident. Countries aren't around forever…

In terms of policy, let's say we're a country of 60 million or 70 million by the year 2067. (At 100 million, we'd be the second biggest country in the West – smaller than the U.S. still, but bigger than any country in Europe, with the exception of Russia.) I think, other things being equal, we'll be able to

accomplish many more things as a country — across our territory and internationally. But also, we'll be able to properly fend for ourselves in the context of far greater geopolitical pressures. We're already feeling the birth pangs of these greater geopolitical pressures, with what's happening in the United States. If you look at Canada as a bit of a box geographically, the bottom border is "A" — the American border — the "E" is Europe, east of Newfoundland. Those are well known to us. But there are two other new borders this century that are less appreciated, and which will exert great pressure on us over the course of the coming decades. The first one is "R", which is Russia, over the fast-melting Arctic. And we have only 115,000 people populating all three northern territories — pitifully low if we are going to imagine ourselves controlling the northern border, or even exerting our sovereignty, our national interest there. We're going to have many more people there. And moving towards the 60 or 70 million by 2067 will certainly help that. And I imagine a lot of them are going to go to the north. Whether we realize it now or not, we're going to need a lot more people there. And the final side is the "C", which is China – Whitehorse is much closer to China than Sydney, Australia. So too is Prince Rupert. China is now a force that we've never really felt in modern Canada. For the whole 150 years since Confederation, China was destabilized and trying to find its feet after its defeats in the Opium Wars. Now they're back to where they think they should always have been, and we're going to have to reckon with them, in all the dimensions of national strategy and policy. And we're very close to them, and so you're going to see huge northwest influx of demographic pressures.

So we're going to need more people in this beautiful country, and I think we'll be in a better place, in net terms. And there are a whole host of other things we can accomplish economically and socially with a larger population. There will be a host of challenges, to be sure, but I hope we will be well on our way (by 2067) and there won't be any debate by that point that we'll need a larger population to reckon with our circumstances.

Q: Some people raise concerns about a greater population, and specifically the integration of immigrants, so perhaps you could address that. And picking up on another point, what do you think are the likely threats to Canada's existence by 2067?

A: There are plenty. Countries don't last as long as we think they do in modern history. I had one of my graduate research assistants calculate that a modern state over the last 200 years tends to last an average of about 60 years. The Soviet Union was thought by many of its citizens to be interminable. It lasted only 70 years. Canada's been around for 150. Many of the modern Middle Eastern states have been crumbling, and they've generally been around for that quantum, about 60 or 70 years. A good number of Asian and African states are quite new. All of the post-Soviet states are inherently unstable. Ukraine just had a revolution and then annexation, so it only lasted 23 years… So Canada is unusual and exceptional, having had both strategic and constitutional stability for about 150 years. We're pressing our historical luck. What could change? Well, the threats are external and internal. The internal one, for now, seems obvious: the Quebec question. If Quebec should ever go, I think I've been one of the leaders on the public record in saying that's the end of Canada, because we will not be able to stitch this

thing back together. Canada would fall apart very similarly to how the Soviet Union fell apart – into many constituent parts. We don't know what those parts would be called, but it would be exceedingly difficult for Ottawa to reassert the old legitimacy on Victoria and St. John's, and Yellowknife and Whitehorse in the north, with the excision of one of the central parts. That could happen very quickly and at any time over the coming decades — so that's always something to watch and manage.

The second domestic challenge to watch for is the constitutional contradiction between the "two nations" idea of Canada at Confederation — English and French Canada — and the idea that all of a sudden we're going to resuscitate Indigenous peoples into co-equals in the governance of Canada. Morally, it's attractive, but strategically and constitutionally, it will be very difficult to engineer...

Externally, there are real threats. If there's a major war between Russia and Western powers, I think there's a big chance that Canada in this century would be invaded. Same with China. We are no longer very far at all from these countries and civilizations in technological terms, or in psychological terms. The Arctic is melting. If we don't have proper relations with all of these major border countries, and if we also have an unstable, capricious or inconstant southern neighbour to our south, as is the case today, who will defend us? The U.S. may defend us, or they may not — we may not know until the 11th hour. For now, such thinking is not generally part of our strategic imaginary, but we must realize that we are now surrounded by great powers at all our borders — including the European powers. We don't know how stable or happy these powers will be in the future, or how they will relate among themselves. That's going to put a lot of pressure on us. And we may well survive. But we're going to have to think like a bigger country, at a higher standard, if we're going to make it through the century unscathed. I've been writing about it for a decade, but I would say the American presidency with Trump really puts all of this into relief. And certainly the conflict between Russia and the West, and the brewing tensions between Washington and Beijing, also make the stakes very stark, if we Canadians have a proper appreciation of our geography and work from the right mental map. In other words, a conflict between America and China, or America and Russia, puts us right in harm's way, with no absolute guarantee of protection. Right now, we neither can imagine that scenario in which we are actually threatened, nor can we imagine ourselves actually being able to do anything about it.

This is really, I would say, part of the 100-million construct. We're going to need to think for ourselves. 100 million is Canada thinking for itself...

Q: What kind of a country do you think we have to evolve into in order to confidently embrace so many more people? And how does this relate to the "colonial" mindset you've discussed in your writing?

A: The colonial or quasi-colonial mindset is in the present, too, not just in the past. We shouldn't feel insulted when I say that. We all bathe in the same water—myself happily included. In strategic terms, we have a quasi-colonial mindset because we've never really broken out of it and never had the pressure to break out of it. Short of a major national crisis or war, we would need to have a sustained mental revolution, or policy revolution rather than a revolution against the Crown or against our de

facto imperial neighbours or cousins… We can absorb a huge number of people over time. I don't think there's any question that, territorially, we've got plenty of room. If we distribute the population much more deliberately across the country — I really do believe in proper, choreographed distribution of the population. We're very passive in this respect now, but over time we're going to have to be much more deliberate. I mentioned the northern flank — a whole northern immigration strategy for Canada would seem to be naturally coming before long…

As for integration, we'd be very naïve to think the country can absorb anyone from any place at any pace, and that nobody should blink because that would be racist. I don't think that's true at all. We should be very deliberate about how we choreograph the look and feel of the country. At the same time, we should be distributing the population and getting talent from around the world — there are no contradictions there, but we have to be very careful, because outside of Toronto, the majority-minority dynamics are very sensitive in many regions of the country – starting, of course, with Quebec…

Of course, it would still be an entirely multicultural country — with at least two nations, or maybe multiple nations given the Indigenous question. But Canada would have a much more distributed population, with highly multi-ethnic big cities all over the place. And, by the way, there would be new big cities by that point. We don't know whether Toronto will be the major city by 2067. But there will definitely be new cities, some of them new big cities. Take the north, for instance. You can imagine a city like Whitehorse all of a sudden having a couple million people – same with Yellowknife. Because we're going to need about 10 million people in the north over the course of the next 60 or 70 years to manage that huge space.