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Quebec–US Relations: The Big Picture

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to propose a periodization of the international policy between Quebec and the United States focusing on two levels of analysis: The first level is interested in public policy instruments such as the opening of delegations, while the second focuses on the paradigm of state action. From these two main criteria, I propose an analysis of five periods. The first period (1867–1960) is characterized by the absence of a structured paradigm and the virtual absence of diplomatic instruments with the exception of a tourism and trade office in New York. The second period (1960–1976) reflects a desire by Quebec to develop a larger presence in the United States with the creation of many instruments, as the public policy paradigm is gradually being built. The third period (1976–1980) is characterized by Quebec sovereignists' awareness of the importance of the United States. This period is noted for a significant paradigm shift. The fourth period (1980–2001) is marked by the turn toward free trade. The last period (2001 to present) is characterized by the importance of new challenges that extend the public policy paradigm to issues such as security in the 9/11 environment, as well as to energy and environmental issues.

KEYWORDS

International policy; Quebec; United States; periodization; paradiplomacy; paradigm shift

Quebec's relationship with the United States is of paramount importance for Quebec. Louis Balthazar notes that this American neighbor has been "for better or for worse, an essential partner in the evolution of Quebec" (Balthazar 2006b, 115).¹ If, historically, it was the France–Quebec relationship that fostered the development of an international policy by the Quebec government, an important transition has taken place since the early 2000s, with the United States gradually becoming a principal area of concern for Quebec—to such an extent that the annual budgets devoted to Quebec–US relations by the Ministère des Relations Internationales et de la Francophonie (MRIF) exceed those for relations between France and Quebec. In 2016, Quebec operated delegations and offices in six US cities: New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Washington, Chicago, and Atlanta.²

The relationship historically between Quebec and the executive branch of the US federal government has always been difficult or nonexistent. John Ciaccia, Minister for

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International Affairs from 1989 to 1994 under the Robert Bourassa government, agrees: “If Quebec wants to go to Washington, it must go there with the Canadian government” (quoted in Balthazar and Hero 1999, 65). According to Louis Balthazar and Alfred O. Hero, “There are no strictly political relations between Quebec and the United States for the reason that Washington never wanted to treat Quebec as an autonomous political actor. For the US government, there is no other party than the Federal Government of Canada” (Balthazar and Hero 1999, 65).

Hence, relations between Quebec and the United States have not followed the same path as France–Quebec relations; indeed, several French presidents have maintained direct and privileged relations with Quebec premiers (Paquin 2006; Bastien 1999; Bernier 1996). There are, of course, exceptions. René Lévesque, for example, very briefly met Ronald Reagan at the Quebec Summit in 1985. Lucien Bouchard chatted for a few minutes with President Bill Clinton at the International Conference on Federalism held at Mont-Tremblant in 1999. Very soon after his election in 2003, Jean Charest met one-on-one with Secretary of State Colin Powell. In 2005, during a visit to Washington and Virginia, Charest also met with three influential members of the Bush administration, Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, and Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman.³ Historically, representatives of the Quebec government have had more interactions with members of Congress. Consider for example René Lévesque’s relations with the Democratic senator from Maine, Edmund Muskie, or with the Republican senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms. More recently, Premier Jean Charest was also able to meet with several members of Congress, including former New York senator Hillary Clinton.

Although Quebec does not have a direct and privileged relation with the US federal government, as it does with France, the presence of two US consulates in Quebec, one in Montreal and a second in Quebec City, means that Washington implicitly recognizes the uniqueness of Quebec in North America.

To understand the relationship between Quebec and the United States, this article will focus on two levels of analysis: the first level is related to public policy instruments, such as the opening of delegations or trade offices, while the second focuses on the paradigm of state action. From these two main criteria, the text is sequentially divided into five periods, representing many progressive steps toward the institutionalization of Quebec–US relations. The first period spans the years from 1867 to 1960 and is characterized by a virtual absence of government policy in regard to the United States with the exception of the opening of Quebec’s representation in New York during World War II. The second period, which begins with the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and ends with the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, reflects a desire to develop a presence in the United States. The third period from 1976 to 1980 is characterized by an awareness among Quebec *souverainistes* of the importance of the United States as indicated by the establishment of *Operation Amérique* by the PQ government of René Lévesque. The fourth period, from the mid-1980s until the end of the 1990s, was marked by a pro-free trade position in Quebec. The last period, which extends from the early 2000s to the present day, is characterized by the importance of new issues such as post-9/11 security, as well as energy and environmental relations.

The first period: 1867–1960

If the history of Quebec has always been affected by its spatial location in North America, the relationship between Quebec and the United States was not guided or structured by a government policy before the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. It is true that the Patriot movement (*Les Patriotes*), led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, took much of its inspiration from the American Revolution and even sought to establish formal links with that country. For a time, the Parti rouge (the party that succeeded the Patriots) also proposed the annexation of Lower Canada with the United States (Lamonde and Corbo 1999, 166). Several Quebec premiers traveled to the United States on official business.

Quebec also experienced a huge migration movement, an exodus of nearly 900,000 people between 1840 and 1930 into the United States (Roby 2000; Lavoie 1979). According to historian Jean Lamarre, between 10,000 and 15,000 of the earliest of these Quebec migrants participated in the US Civil War on the side of northerners in the Union Army (Lamarre 2006; see also Wade 1946). The attraction of American investments represented a fundamental economic development strategy for several premiers including Lomer Gouin (1905–1920), Louis-Alexandre Taschereau (1920–1936), and Maurice Duplessis (1936–1939 and 1944–1959).

Despite the importance of familial and economic links between Quebec and the United States, when the time came for the Government of Quebec to post formal representatives abroad (not simple “immigration officers”), France and Britain officially preceded the United States. Quebec opened an office abroad with Hector Fabre’s appointment as agent-general to Paris from 1882 until 1910. The Quebec government moved in 1911 to establish a true General Agency in London. This decision is easily explained by the fact that Canada was then part of the British Empire and that Britain was the largest investor in Quebec. More surprising, however, Belgium became the third country in which Quebec opted to open a mission when Premier Lomer Gouin appointed Godfroy Langlois agent-general of the Province of Quebec in the Kingdom of Belgium in 1914. The agency closed its doors in 1933 in the context of the 1929 worldwide economic crisis. The Act respecting Agents-General Abroad was subsequently repealed by the government of Maurice Duplessis in 1936.

It was not until the election of the government of Adélar Godbout and the appointment of Charles Chartier as agent-general on June 28, 1940, that Quebec opened its first official representation in the United States, in New York City. The duty of the new agent-general was to develop foreign trade, help with the establishment of new industries, and promote tourism and all other purposes under provincial jurisdiction. The General Agency was officially a “Tourism and Trade Office” and was located at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. When Duplessis returned to power in 1944, he reduced the budget of the New York Agency, which was thus cut off from almost any significant means through which to undertake diplomatic initiatives on behalf of Quebec until the Quiet Revolution.

The second period: 1960–1976

In 1960, the Quebec Liberal Party program was effectively silent on the place and role of Quebec’s international relations. Like most Quebec premiers since 1867, then Liberal

leader Jean Lesage wanted to establish trade agencies in Europe and elsewhere to attract foreign capital and industrial projects. It was in fact the actions of the Lesage government between 1960 and 1966 that gave Quebec's international engagement its strongest foundations.⁴

During this second period, from 1960 until the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, six important policies collectively structured the new relationship between Quebec and the world: (1) the opening of the Maison du Québec, a mini-ambassy in Paris; (2) the conclusion of the first international *entente* or agreement on education with France; (3) the formulation of the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine, the legal basis for Quebec's international actions; (4) the establishment of a protocol office in 1966 and the creation of the new Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs in 1968, the forerunner to the MRIF; (5) Expo 67 where the Quebec government hosted 44 heads of state or their representatives; and (6) the participation by the Quebec government in an international conference of Ministers of Education from Francophone countries, the reports of which culminated in the creation of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie in the 1980s. These precedents gave Quebec an internationally unique personality at the time (Paquin 2006).

It is easy to see from this series of events that during this period, the Quebec government's international policy with respect to the United States came second to the France–Quebec relationship, the real engine of Quebec's international activism in the 1960s. That being said, this period also marked the emergence of an international policy toward the United States by the Government of Quebec. In 1961, the General Agency in New York was promoted to the higher status of General Delegation. Following the 1962 election, the Quebec government knocked for the first time at the door of the financial centers of Wall Street to finance electricity nationalization projects in Quebec. This new financial strategy of the Quebec government necessitated a more significant presence of Quebec in the financial capital of the United States.

At that time, the Quebec government harbored the ambition that the relationship with the United States would be structured along the same lines as the France–Quebec relationship. Thus, in April 1965, André Patry, special advisor to Jean Lesage in international affairs, went to Washington to meet with State Department senior staff, without notifying the Canadian authorities. The US Consul General in Montreal facilitated the holding of this meeting. The purpose of this visit was to secure for the Quebec Government Office in New York the tax benefits normally reserved for consulates in foreign countries. Quebec hoped to convince the United States to accept the request, threatening to tax the US consulates in Montreal and Quebec City should they refuse. This request, which had also been made by Jean Lesage a few months before, was rejected again by the State Department. US officials essentially told Patry: "Run your request by Ottawa and we'll see." Quebec was not a concern for Americans, and the State Department, unlike France, would not confer special status on Quebec.

During this visit, Patry noted two significant things. First, the US government did not want to deal directly with the Province of Quebec, and second, they had an incomplete knowledge of modern-day Quebec. Upon his return to Quebec, Patry advocated a wide-ranging campaign to the media and the US authorities on the special character of Quebec. This proposal proved difficult to carry out because while there were many Francophiles in the Quebec government, specialists on the US were considerably more rare (Paquin 2006).

Still, in the 1960s, a tradition was born in Quebec–US relations of official visits by premiers—especially to New York City. Premier Lesage visited the United States five times. His successor, Daniel Johnson, traveled to New York twice. Robert Bourassa went south of the border seven times often to promote the James Bay mega hydro-electric dams in Northern Quebec (Balthazar 2011). Other links were also developed with the United States during the Quiet Revolution, especially with the American South. Jean Lesage went to Louisiana in 1963 to seek to institutionalize links between Louisiana and Quebec.

The Quebec government also created new offices in the United States in the late 1960s. Contrary to what several interpretations suggest, it was not Bourassa who instigated the opening of offices in the United States, but Jean-Jacques Bertrand of the Union Nationale (UN). Under the UN, Quebec opened several offices in the United States in 1969: in Boston, Lafayette, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Dallas. Bourassa opened his share of Quebec diplomatic offices, but with a clear focus outside the United States: Brussels in 1972, Tokyo in 1973, as well as immigration offices in Athens, Rome, and Beirut. In 1973, Bourassa's government participated in the inaugural conference of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, a tradition still ongoing today. The same year, Bourassa delivered a speech at the Economic Club of New York. These events were the results of the relations with the United States becoming more important and more professional (Balthazar 2011, 248; Bernier 1996).

The third period: 1976–1980

This third period of Quebec's formal engagement with the United States began in the aftermath of the election of the Parti Québécois (PQ) on November 15, 1976. Nothing indicated that once elected, the PQ would work to intensify Quebec's international policies toward the United States. While newly elected Premier René Lévesque had been a war correspondent for the US Army, and while the party's program stressed the importance of relations between Quebec and the United States, the PQ advocated for a sovereign Quebec—a sovereign Quebec that would withdraw from NATO, would not be involved in NORAD, and officially would be a neutral country, indicated a very naive understanding of international relations on the part of the Parti Québécois in a Cold War context (Roussel 2006).

The intensification of Quebec's US policy was born out of a crisis that was created by Lévesque himself. With the arrival in office of the Parti Québécois and with Lévesque as head of the government, small institutional investors and insurance companies were starting to sell off Hydro-Quebec and Quebec government stocks and shares. This made it increasingly expensive for Hydro-Quebec and the Quebec government to borrow in New York. Since most of Quebec's presence in the United States served to facilitate financial operations of the Quebec government, a correction was in order. In addition, for a government that wanted to achieve sovereignty, it was imperative to reassure its southern neighbor and to clarify Quebec's position regarding international relations.

Like his predecessors, Lévesque went to the United States in the first months following his election as premier. On January 25, 1977, Lévesque gave a speech to the Economic Club of New York before an audience that included the financial elite of the financial capital of the United States. Prior to the election of the Parti Québécois, very

few Americans were interested in Quebec politics. After November 1976, some investors became nervous since at the time Hydro-Quebec was one of Wall Street's largest clients. Americans in general had no particular sympathy for nationalism, except their own, and for the Quebec sovereignty project in particular. When Lévesque said in his infamous speech that Quebec sovereignty could be compared to the American War of Independence, it did not convince anyone. The vice president of the large Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company declared after exiting the conference: "We thought we were going to get assurances that our investments in Quebec are safe. Instead, he threw us a quote from our own Declaration of Independence." This bank executive went further and declared that Quebec sovereignty was instead comparable to the US Civil War (Lisée 1990, 223).

The next day, financial markets cast off Quebec. Shareholders of the American company Johns Manville, which was the largest producer of asbestos in Quebec, divested half a million in stocks in one day. It now feared nationalization. To further complicate the situation, Lévesque's speech was broadcast live across Canada.

To underscore the sovereigntist blunder, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau decided it was time to pay a state visit to United States. The prime minister was received in Washington with all the esteem due a person of his stature. Trudeau was invited to deliver a speech to both houses of Congress in Washington, in and of itself, a rare privilege. Trudeau received a warm welcome, although many in the United States did not warm to his Third Option policy and his distinct brand of economic nationalism. Trudeau was, however, applauded for his speech after declaring that Quebec secession would represent a "crime against the history of mankind."

It was in this context that President Jimmy Carter developed an American doctrine vis-à-vis the Quebec national question. This doctrine consisted of three elements: (1) The United States does not intend to intervene in the internal affairs of Canada and therefore does not take position on constitutional issues; (2) The United States has a preference for Canadian unity; and (3) The United States will respect the will of the people of Canada (Balthazar 2006b).⁵

The Lévesque government, which had pledged to hold a referendum in its first mandate, had to develop a strategy toward US opinion leaders to reassure investors, but also to make them understand that a sovereign Quebec could be a loyal ally to the United States and not a "Cuba of the North." First, it became important to revise the international policy positions of the Parti Québécois and to abandon its neutralist position. Claude Morin and René Lévesque succeeded in changing the party position in 1979. A sovereign Quebec would remain a member of NORAD and NATO. Second, it became essential to develop a strategy vis-à-vis the United States. This strategy took the name: Operation Amérique. The goal of this public diplomacy strategy was to highlight the commitment of Quebecers to the rule of law, democracy and particularly its respect for its financial obligations in the case of a "yes" victory (Bernier 1996, 98). The Quebec government also wanted the US government to remain relatively neutral before and during the referendum campaign of 1980 (Balthazar, Bélanger, and Mace 1993, 90). Opération Amérique was also important because, according to Lise Bissonnette, before the establishment of this public diplomacy strategy, Quebec's policy toward the United States was largely improvised and reactive (Bissonnette 1981).

Thus, as part of Opération Amérique, a new delegation was opened in Atlanta in 1977, and in 1978 Quebec set up a tourism office in Washington that was linked to the Quebec delegation in New York until the end of the 1990s. Ministerial missions to the United States increased and the Quebec government deliberately sought to be more present in foreign policy elite forums (Balthazar 2006b). The attention paid by the Quebec government to its US neighbor was unexpected. Contrary to what one might have anticipated, the Lévesque government was more sensitive to issues related to the United States, especially economic ones, than his Liberal predecessor (Balthazar 2006a, 154).

The fourth period: 1980–2001

Opération Amérique had been strategized in relation to the referendum on sovereignty-association held in May 1980. After the referendum defeat on November 15, 1980, it became necessary for the Government of Quebec to adjust its US strategy. The prevailing context effectively guided the procedures that were pursued. After the reelection of the Parti Québécois in 1981, a second sovereignty referendum was not proposed; it was thus no longer necessary to reassure American elites as to the potential consequences of Quebec independence. Furthermore, Quebec's economy was significantly affected by the recession of 1982.

It was in this context that the Parti Québécois became even more favorably disposed to exporting to the United States and attracting US foreign investment—a shift which presaged the Parti Québécois' support for the Canada–US Free Trade Agreement a few years later. On April 30, 1981, René Lévesque appointed Rodrigue Biron, former head of the right-wing Union Nationale, as Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism. The Quebec government also sought to differentiate itself from the Canadian federal government's policy regarding the screening of foreign investments, especially US ones. Jacques-Yvan Morin, minister of Intergovernmental Affairs of Quebec, declared during a visit to San Francisco that the Quebec government did not share Ottawa's view on foreign investment. Quebec, by contrast, advocated a more open, decidedly less-restrictive policy (politically and bureaucratically), and the development of a north-south economic axis (Balthazar 2006b).

Also in 1982, at the request of Bernard Landry, the Lévesque government created the Department of International Trade. Landry's aim was to further develop economic relations with the United States. In 1984, Landry was appointed minister of International Relations, which was then formally separated from Intergovernmental Affairs. He presided over the drafting of the first policy statement that described more systematically Quebec's international policies. This document confirmed the economic shift of Quebec's international relations (MRI 1984).

Under Robert Bourassa, Quebec's international relations increasingly focused on economic matters. This is easily explained given the political and economic context of the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the arrival of John Ciaccia as the head of the new Department of International Affairs, clearer guidelines were made regarding Quebec's engagement with the United States. In the white paper published by the Government of Quebec in 1991, the United States emerged as Quebec's priority area abroad. The white paper focused fundamentally on the government's economic strategy. Consider the following:

The importance of trade with the United States and the impact of decisions made in this country require from Quebec specific and sustained efforts to make known to diverse influential circles in financial, industrial, academic and cultural spheres, the main aspects of the current reality in Quebec. (Ministry of International Affairs 1991, 139)

The other significant issue dominating this period was free trade negotiations with the United States. The signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Canada and the United States in 1988 was one of the most important events in Quebec and Canadian history. In Quebec, the Liberal Party, after some reluctance, supported the agreement. The surprise came from the Parti Québécois, a social democratic party, which was also in favor (even before the Liberal Party) of the agreement. The reasons for this support were numerous. Quebec clearly feared a return of protectionism in the United States. In addition, the Liberal Party believed the FTA would provide the advantage of reducing the Government of Canada's capacity to intervene in economic issues in Quebec. For the Parti Québécois, Quebec integration in a free trade area would promote North-South trade and not East-West, making Quebec less dependent on the Canadian market, in addition to substantially reducing the costs of secession in the future (Paquin 2001). A few years later, the Quebec government also supported NAFTA, even though the Parti Québécois leader, Jacques Parizeau, had some reservations since he feared the impact of NAFTA on social programs in Quebec.

The Quebec government, somewhat surprisingly—in the face of growing exports to the United States and a large trade surplus—opted to reduce its presence in the United States in the second half of the 1990s. Following the second failed referendum of 1995, the Quebec government, citing its zero-deficit policy, decided to close many of its offices abroad. In the United States, offices were closed in Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles in 1995 and 1996.

The fifth period: 2001 to the present day

The fifth period is marked by an even greater emphasis on Quebec–US relations. This strategy began under the Parti Québécois and was energetically expanded by Jean Charest's Liberal Party, which took power in 2003.

The revival of Quebec's presence in the United States came about gradually starting in the late 1990s after Lucien Bouchard opened trade missions in the United States. This marked a strategic turn as the premier understood the importance of the United States for Quebec. In its "Plan Stratégique 2001–2004," the Government of Quebec made relations with the United States a priority. In this document published in 2001, it states: "The ten years of free trade with the American partner, by considerably increasing foreign trade, showed that Quebec was right to take the lead in favoring the signing of the FTA, and then NAFTA" (Gouvernement du Québec 2001, 37).

After the wave of closures of thirteen Quebec representations abroad that had taken place in 1995–1996, Quebec redeployed its network in the United States, opening or reopening offices in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and a small office in Miami (in 2006, the Miami office was closed and the Atlanta office was reopened). The Government of Quebec also created dedicated research and teaching chairs on the United States at Quebec universities. In 2002, under the administration of the Parti Québécois and for the first time in Quebec history, the budget of the Ministère des Relations Internationales

dedicated to the United States was higher than that for France. This remains the case today (Paquin 2006).

This US strategy would be strengthened and intensified by Jean Charest's government, notably with its 2006 international policy and in the 2010 "Stratégie du gouvernement du Québec à l'égard des États-Unis." The latter document sets out why the United States is an important strategic partner and confirms that along with traditional policies relating to export promotion and investment attraction, new themes in the relationship with the United States are emerging, citing Quebec leadership on energy and environmental matters, and Quebec's contribution to the security of the North American continent (MRI 2010, 21–30). The "Government of Quebec's 2010–2013 US Action Plan" sets out five broad objectives and thirty-eight very concrete measures aimed at: fostering trade; ensuring Quebec's leadership regarding energy and the environment; contributing to the security of the North American continent; encouraging the sharing and promotion of Quebec's culture and identity; and increasing Quebec's capacity to take action and support the development of expertise (Bernier 2011).

With regard to the government action paradigm, the Quebec government contends that the increasingly intertwined Quebec and American economies assures Quebec of an economic destiny as close to that of the northeastern United States, as to that of central Canada. The Quebec government must therefore actively combat the protectionist reactions of some members of Congress. From this perspective, the American states are partners of choice. The Quebec government must therefore weave closer ties with them, either bilaterally or in multilateral substate forums (Paquin and Chaloux 2011).

In the early 2000s, Quebec's US strategy consisted of consolidating or weaving new ties with American states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in order to promote its interests. According to the MRIF, "Québec government ministers have carried out a number of missions to the United States since April 2003. The Premier has traveled to the US more than 20 times and the Minister of International Relations has made more than 10 trips south of the border. About 20 other cabinet ministers have carried out at least one mission each to the United States" (MRIF 2014).

The intensification of cross-border relations has given rise to the creation of multi-lateral substate organizations that are often quite specialized (Government of Canada 2005). They cover areas as varied as health, boundary water management (in particular the Great Lakes) and waterway use, the application of laws, energy, the fight against forest fires, environmental protection, cross-border security, power systems management, and administration of the roads and bridges network (Morin and Poliquin 2014; Paquin and Chaloux 2011; Leblond 2011; Von Hlatky and Trisko 2011).

Quebec has, for example, intensified its role in the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers (NEG–ECP). The NEG–ECP, created in 1973 in reaction to the energy crisis, brings together the governors of all six New England states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont) and five provinces (the Maritime Provinces and Quebec). It is an important forum that addresses issues such as cooperation in the areas of energy, the environment (notably with the creation of a regional action plan to battle climate change), trade, transportation, and security (Chaloux 2014).

The Government of Quebec also joined the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments. This conference is one of four regional chapters of the

Council of State Governments that brings together ten northeastern American states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont) as well as Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and Ontario and the Maritime provinces. This association promotes interparliamentary and intergovernmental collaboration. Quebec was the first non-American affiliated member (the National Assembly has participated in the activities of this conference since 1990) and chaired the organization in 2007.⁶ The Quebec government also maintains relations with the National Governors' Association. This association, founded in 1908, is the bipartisan organization of US governors. Its mission is to promote the role of the states and to defend American interests, speak with a collective voice on national policy before the federal government, foster the exchange of information, and share best practices on public policy between the US states.

Further evidence of Quebec's deepening commitment to engagement with the United States, came when Quebec and Georgia cofounded the Southeastern United States–Canadian Provinces alliance (SEUS–CP). The SEUS–CP defines itself as an economic forum dedicated to increasing trade, promoting bilateral investments and stimulating technological and scientific exchanges. The alliance, launched in Montreal in 2007 with the signing of a joint declaration, is a strategic partnership between six southeastern US states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama) and seven Canadian provinces (Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Labrador).⁷ The group meets annually, on an alternating basis, in Canada and the United States. The last meeting in Canada was held in Halifax in July 2013. David Wilkins, former US ambassador to Canada, cochaired the business program at this conference. The last meeting in the United States took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in May 2014.

In 2007, Quebec joined the North American Strategy for Competitiveness (NASCO), which is a coalition of North American governments, businesses, and educational institutions, in three NAFTA countries, that collaborate on issues linked to energy, trade, and transportation. The Quebec premier has participated in several meetings and hosted the annual conference and leaders' summit in June 2009.

The Government of Quebec is decidedly active on climate change issues. It is an observer in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which is a cooperative effort among several northeastern US states to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Since 2007, Quebec has participated in The Climate Registry, a nonprofit organization whose aim is to create a voluntary registry to measure, report, and verify greenhouse gas emissions and carbon credits. This registry, managed by its members, could be used in regional carbon markets. All of the Canadian provinces and territories, and no fewer than 39 US states as well as six Mexican states are officially members.⁸

The Government of Quebec has also been a partner member since 2008 of the Western Climate Initiative, formed in 2007. Despite the withdrawal of a number of American states, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis, the Quebec government nevertheless linked its cap and trade system to that of California. This market is thus the largest carbon market in North America and the second largest in the world after the European Union (Chaloux 2014). Currently, the Quebec government participates in more than 15 multilateral cross-border groups and maintains bilateral relations with several states, such as New York and Vermont (Paquin and Chaloux 2011).

After the election of the Parti Québécois in September 2012, measures were introduced to return to a balanced budget. The ministry was given a new name, the Ministère des Relations internationales, de la Francophonie et du Commerce extérieur. Although its responsibilities increased with the addition of foreign trade, it faced budget cuts of approximately 15 percent for the International Relations section. Despite these cuts, the ministry's budget rose from C\$115 million to nearly C\$115 million in 2012–2013. Under the Parti Québécois of Pauline Marois, the Quebec government's priorities in regard to the United States remained essentially the same: trade and investment, energy, the environment, and transportation were key issues, as were security, justice, and governance. Higher education, research, and innovation were brought to the forefront, along with cultural and identity issues.

When the Liberal Party, led by Philippe Couillard, was elected in April 2014, foreign trade was removed from the new ministry of International Relations and la Francophonie and a wave of governmental budget cuts ensued. The Couillard government closed the Quebec delegations in Moscow, Santiago, and Taipei. A new delegation is scheduled to open in Houston, to be realized by realigning select personnel and financial resources from the Atlanta office.

Conclusion

Unlike relations between France and Quebec, relations between Quebec and the United States were not rapidly institutionalized from the top. Quebec had difficulty making itself heard and officially recognized by the United States as an important political entity.

Prior to the 1960s, the Government of Quebec was not greatly interested in what was going on south of the Canadian border. Quebec's representation in New York was practically without means until the early 1960s. It was under the Union Nationale government that Quebec expanded its presence in the United States in the late 1960s. Under Robert Bourassa, the importance of the economic and financial issues obliged the Quebec government to further expand its US policy. It was, however, during the first mandate of the Parti Québécois that the Quebec government understood the importance of implementing a sustained and coherent US policy. The periods that followed simply gave more importance first to economic and trade questions, then more recently to matters of security, energy, and the environment.

As Quebec has very little access to the federal executive, the dominant strategy at present is to join important networks of federated states and to maintain bilateral relations with US states that are key for Quebec. Quebec will henceforth be operating in a totally new dynamic with the United States, which allows it to better promote its interests with partners that possess skills and interests similar to its own.

The challenges of Quebec–United States relations are of critical importance for Quebec's future, as the United States is likely to indefinitely remain its largest trade partner and its largest investor. Additionally, the decisions that are taken south of the border, whether on trade negotiations such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the "Buy American" push, or the shale gas revolution in the United States, all have fundamental impacts on Quebec. There is now a general consensus among all various political entities in Quebec of the singular importance of the United States to the future prosperity of the province.

Notes

1. When the quote comes from a French source, the author made the translation.
2. A new delegation is planned for Houston (but using resources from the Atlanta offices).
3. <https://www.premier-ministre.gouv.qc.ca/actualites/communiqués/2005/avril/2005-04-19a.asp>, Accessed July 2014.
4. It is true that Antonio Barrette, head of the Union Nationale, had also promised that his party would open offices in Paris and London if he returned to power (Paquin 2006).
5. That being said, in 1995, Washington indicated more clearly its preference for a united Canada. The then US ambassador in Ottawa, James Blanchard, made clear to everyone his opposition to the sovereigntist project (Blanchard 1998). When President Bill Clinton came to Ottawa in February 1995, he too was clearly favorable to Canadian unity. In the lead-up to the Quebec sovereignty referendum of October 30, 1995, Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher made statements in favor of the “no” victory. We also now know that Clinton would have reserved his decision in case of a “yes” majority, and would have waited until the federal government and Quebec had negotiated a formal agreement before commenting publicly (Radio-Canada 2014).
6. <http://www.mrifce.gouv.qc.ca/en/Relations-du-Quebec/Ameriques/Etats-Unis/Relations-bilaterales/ERC-CSG>. Page consulted July 4, 2014.
7. To read the joint declaration, see http://www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/premier/seus_joint_declaration.fr.pdf.
8. <http://www.mrif.gouv.qc.ca/en/Relations-du-Quebec/Ameriques/Etats-Unis/Relations-bilaterales/RGGI>. Page consulted July 4, 2014.

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