

# Ignatieff is more of a challenge for Harper

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**A5** CHARLES MOORE  
AT LARGE

Canadian politics in 2009 is guaranteed to be a lot different than it was in 2008. The snake-bit, game-changing economy will ensure that.

Stephen Harper cruised through his first three years as Prime Minister with a weak and fractious opposition in Parliament allowing him to govern almost, if not quite, as if he had a majority.

Ironically, heading into 2009 with a significantly strengthened minority, Harper's cruising days are over.

Having the hapless, ineffectual Stéphane Dion as Opposition leader was a gift to Harper that just kept on giving. The prospect, however remote, of Dion becoming prime minister had me thinking about looking into emigration options, and the Oct. 14 election result which saw the Liberal Party decimated to its lowest share of the popular vote in over a century was evidence that many other Canadians were underwhelmed by Mr. Dion on as well.

However, the coronation of Michael Ignatieff as new Liberal Party leader changes the dynamic. Not that there is evidence of Iggymania sweeping the country, at least not yet, but his generally well-received ascendancy is presumably the key factor pulling the Liberals into a popular support dead heat with the Conservatives according to a Nanos Research/Canadian Press poll, released late last week.

With Ignatieff, Harper will be squaring off against a more evenly-matched Opposition leader. While their backgrounds are very different, both men are highly intelligent, and I think Harper's assessment of Ignatieff in an interview with CTV Atlantic's Steve Murphy as "a thoughtful and cautious man" aptly applies to both party leaders.

For me, the Ignatieff leadership removes a lot of anxiety regarding the course Canada might be taking in these very challenging times. A Dion administration would've been a painful fiasco and disaster, and a coalition of Dion sharing power with the NDP's Jack Layton, propped-up by the Bloc Quebecois, even worse. Ignatieff, on the other hand, is a man for whose life achievements I have genuine respect and admiration, and I think his philosophical instincts are basically sound.

In his nominating speech for Grover Cleveland at the U.S. Democratic Convention of 1884, General Edward Stuyvesant Bragg famously said of Cleveland: "they love him most for the enemies he has made." I could say something the same of Michael Ignatieff. We have many of the same ideological and philosophical adversaries, who have accused Ignatieff of taking positions diametrically opposite to where a majority of Canadians stood on issues, such as his originally supporting regime change by force in Iraq, as did I. We've both somewhat revised our views on that matter in light of 20/20 hindsight, but Ignatieff's observation in 2003 that the invasion would not be "morally unproblematic," but essentially boiled down to a choice between two evils: leaving Saddam Hussein in place and targeted use of force which would inevitably "kill people but free a nation from the tyrant's grip."

It was a responsible assessment at the time based on what was known, as is his subsequent observation that he'd made a faulty judgment-call for the right reasons (saving the Kurds from Saddam Hussein), while opponents of the war may have been right, but for unworthy reasons (ideological opposition to George W. Bush).

Ignatieff has also chosen to wrestle thoughtfully with the real-world moral ambiguities of what constitutes acceptable degrees of coercive interrogation, and Israel's employment of deadly force in response to terrorist assaults, rather than just lapsing into sanctimonious, stop-thought demagoguery against "torture" and (alleged) "war crimes."

I'm pleased with Ignatieff's acknowledgment of the necessity of Israel's actions against the terrorist Hamas satrapy in Gaza, noting to reporters in Halifax last weekend that "Canada has to support the right of a democratic country to defend itself... Israel has been attacked from Gaza, not just last year, but for almost 10 years... Hamas is a terrorist organization and ...is to blame for organizing and instigating these rocket attacks and then for sheltering among civilian populations. Ultimately this thing has to end with an Israel that is recognized, is safe and secure..."

I can support those positions without reservation.

I'm also reasonably happy with Ignatieff's strategy to resuscitate the wheezing economy, pledging permanent tax cuts for low and middle-income Canadians while providing government funding for infrastructure projects, insisting on productivity improvements tied to industry assistance, and that he would rather err taking decisive and quick action and making the occasional mistake than dithering to make sure he "has all the boxes ticked."

I'm still a Stephen Harper fan, and would very much like to see him get his elusive majority, but that seems a more remote likelihood than ever given recent developments. Harper's biggest obstacle to winning a majority now may well be that small-c conservatives like me can countenance the prospect of an Ignatieff Prime ministership as a tolerable alternative, and his brightest hope that Ignatieff's center-right instincts will alienate enough "progressives" to sustain vote-splitting on the left.



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IGGY! I love Iggy!


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**Pseudo Nyme, Acadie** on 15/01/09 10:36:31 AM AST

But boo to Israel and their RIGHTS as a pretext to kill innocent people... C'mon. They cerated that state 60 years ago, and geez they are bombing schools to fight waht" The Hamas, a small group of insurgents throwing artisanal rockets. Israel threw those bleach bombs that are not allowed to be used in urban areas in accordance to international law. Seem fair?



Sorry but this one is pretty cut and dry. Only it is political suicide not to be on the side of the rich and powerful Israel. not ot mention the voter base ( particularly in US our biggest economic partner). So expecting a politician to be honest about it... Forget it. Still ike Iggy though. If anyone can pull it off and make everyone happy, iT's him.

5  THUMBS UP 17  THUMBS DOWN

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**Pseudo Nyme, Acadie** on 15/01/09 10:45:00 AM AST

Of course Mr. Ignatieff is a closer challenge for Mr. Harper and that my friends are called the honeymoon effect, which typically wears off as time goes by. The challenge being that Ignatieff VS Dion is a no brainer. However, today's Angus Reid Poll (Sunday Jan. 18) exhibits that the Cons lead the Libs by 9% and the rest of the parties are irrelevant. It should be noted that Bill #44 will be passed in the HOC on the 27th. Opposition parties would be complete Bozo's to refute it and Canadians would come down hard and award Mr. Harper his preponderance after all! It was just a question of time.

10  THUMBS UP 0  THUMBS DOWN

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**E Mac, Quispamsis** on 18/01/09 02:52:58 PM AST

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