



British Prime Minister David Cameron outside 10 Downing Street following his majority victory in the May 7 election. The Prime Minister's Office, Flickr photo

To Succeed in His Second Term, Cameron Must Solve Two Big Problems: Europe and Scotland

Andrew MacDougall

In the 1972 campaign classic, “The Candidate”, Robert Redford’s unexpectedly victorious senatorial candidate asks his campaign manager the perfect post-upset question: “What do we do now?” It’s a moment more resonant with first-time candidates than incumbents, but it may well have been on David Cameron’s mind on May 8. After his stunning upset, Cameron now faces looming existential crises over Scotland’s future in the United Kingdom and Britain’s future in the European Union. From London, political veteran Andrew MacDougall offers some potential answers.

The passage of time has done little to dampen the shock of the United Kingdom’s May 7 election result. Despite months of polling predicting a hung Parliament and attendant political and market instability, the people of the United Kingdom instead returned Prime Minister David Cameron to Number 10 Downing Street to helm a majority Conservative government.

Armed with his majority, Cameron now has the luxury of ignoring his political opponents; if he keeps his side united he will control the legislative agenda. To succeed in his second term, howev-

er, David Cameron must do a much better job of managing a backbench he has, to date, largely ignored.

With his opposition either facing leadership or internal strife, Cameron is reaching out to cement his position both within his party and the country. To wit, the engine of government is already in gear: a new cabinet has been appointed and a Queen's speech outlining the government's agenda has been delivered.

Cameron has returned key figures to marquee posts to implement his agenda: George Osborne remains Chancellor of the Exchequer; Theresa May remains Home Secretary; Philip Hammond will again handle foreign affairs; and Michael Fallon retains his post as Defence Secretary. There is also continuity in other key departments: Jeremy Hunt once again leads at health; Iain Duncan Smith at the Department of Work and Pensions; and Nicky Morgan returns to Education.

Now that he has his team, Cameron must now get on with business. Having ruled out a third run for prime minister, he must deliver key manifesto policies before succession talk overtakes his final term.

The government knows that the elephantine questions of Scotland and Europe could soon be squashing whatever long-term legislative agenda it has planned.

Cameron moved quickly to turn last year's Scottish referendum victory into a plan to temper Scottish nationalism by offering English MPs English votes for English laws. While immensely popular with his party, it appeared to put party before country.

Despite Scotland sending 56 Scottish National Party MPs to Westminster, the Caledonian contingent will exert little or no influence on the formal parliamentary agenda. The SNP will get the devolution measures proposed by Lord Smith's Commission, and no more.

No matter the final shape of Scot-

“No matter the final shape of Scotland's deal, it is clear Britain will eventually need to have an adult conversation about finding a new, more equitable constitutional arrangement.”

land's deal, it is clear Britain will eventually need to have an adult conversation about finding a new, more equitable constitutional arrangement. In post-election remarks Cameron said his plans are to “create the strongest devolved government anywhere.” He'll have a long way to go to match jurisdictions like Canada, however, where the provinces have control over taxation, health, education, and the implementation of justice.

Cameron won't, however, want to get bogged down in extended constitutional wrangling at home; he's got treaty change with Europe on his agenda and the result here will frame his legacy as prime minister.

Thanks to the rise of the UK Independence Party, the prime minister must attempt to lance the Eurosceptic boil that sits on the body politic of the United Kingdom. Cameron hopes that, by offering and winning a referendum, he can remove the European question from the British political agenda for years to come.

The war will unfold over two battles: the referendum itself; and the preceding negotiation to secure “a better deal” from Europe.

Here, the unexpected majority election result has greatly strengthened Cameron's hand. Even with a slim majority he holds a stronger position than he would with a coalition partner at this side. Every single Tory ran on a manifesto pledge to offer the British people a choice on Europe. As a result, every single European leader knows that a reckoning is coming and that it is in their interest to sweeten Cameron's pot ahead of a vote.

While the so-called “four freedoms”—the free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital—won't be up for negotiation, there is room for movement on other fronts. Cameron knows he won't be able to placate the hard-line group of 60 or so of his MPs that want out of Europe no matter what; his task will be to put something substantive on the table for the remaining 270 in order to try to claim victory.

“If Cameron has his way, he will secure his deal with Europe as soon as possible. The longer the process drags out, the more his hold over his caucus weakens, and the more impact it has on his overall program.”

The shape of the ensuing deal is widely presumed to be immediate concessions on issues like migrant benefits, with eventual, albeit ill-defined, treaty change at some unspecified future moment.

The main challenge in this *pas de deux* will be to keep the entire negotiation from looking like a stitch-up. The rebellious Conservative backbench knows it isn't likely to get significant European treaty change, but it will need to feel that its interests are being pursued with maximum sincerity and vigour by the government.

If Cameron has his way, he will secure his deal with Europe as soon as possible. The longer the process drags out, the more his hold over his



Prime Minister Cameron meets with French President François Hollande at the Élysée in Paris, as part of a post-election tour of four European capitals to launch his EU re-negotiation talks. Flickr photo

caucus weakens, and the more impact it has on his overall program. He has promised a referendum by the end of 2017 but would greatly prefer to hold it in 2016. So, it turns out, would Bank of England Governor Mark Carney, the Canadian whose job of calibrating British monetary policy is made infinitely harder thanks to the political instability caused by haggling over Europe.

And if he gets it wrong, Cameron will forever be the leader who sleepwalked Britain out of Europe. He will curse the day he won the election no one ever predicted he'd win outright.

In addition to the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats, the other group who indisputably got the election wrong were the pollsters.

Month after month, pollsters published polling showing a dead heat between Labour and the Conservatives. Come election night, 36.9 per cent of Britain's pulled the lever for Cameron, versus 30.4 per cent for Labour Leader Ed Miliband.

What happened? In a word: Scotland.

Here, the Scottish Sgian Dubh cut two ways: it took away 40 Labour seats in

Scotland and gave David Cameron a powerful talking point at the doorsteps of middle England.

From the moment it became clear Miliband and Labour couldn't govern without an SNP assist, Cameron had his route back to 10 Downing. For the last two weeks of the campaign a dedicated team of Tory volunteers took to the streets of target seats and pounded the SNP nail into Labour's coffin.

“ From the moment it became clear Miliband and Labour couldn't govern without an SNP assist, Cameron had his route back to 10 Downing. For the last two weeks of the campaign a dedicated team of Tory volunteers took to the streets of target seats and pounded the SNP nail into Labour's coffin. ”

The Conservative campaign was absolutely ruthless in its portrayal of

a weak Miliband in hock to the big-spending Scottish nationalists. This attack neatly piled on voters' pre-existing views of Miliband as a neb-bishy wonk who was unprepared for the hard choices of government.

The external polls might not have caught the swing in key marginal seats, but Conservative campaign guru Lynton Crosby's internal polling did. While Labour continued to talk about their much vaunted target seat strategy, the Conservatives went ahead and executed theirs to perfection.

The reward? A troubled United Kingdom.

Nothing derails a political agenda like an existential crisis. The prime minister faces two—Europe and Scotland—in this, his second term. They will be the fight of Cameron's political life and will define his legacy. But they will hardly be his only battles.

Britain's finances remain in a parlous state. A lack of productivity threatens the long-term recovery of the economy. The armed forces are threadbare. Syria is in flames and ISIS' terror is spreading ever wider. Vladimir Putin's revanchism shows no signs of abating. Greece could yet send the European Union down the drain. And then there are the usual nagging scandals of government: misspending, inept performance by ministers, and tin-pot rebellions.

David Cameron's leadership will be tested to a degree with which he is unfamiliar. He must approach Europe and Scotland with strategy, and not his usual bag of tactics. If he displays leadership and marshals his allies he can win both fights.

In so doing, he would cement his place in history and leave the Conservatives as the dominant party in a United Kingdom. **P**

Contributing Writer Andrew MacDougall, former director of communications for Prime Minister Harper, is a senior executive consultant at MSLGROUP in London, England. andrew.macdougall@mslgroupp.com