

PM moves Hogan in as his acting foreign, defence adviser

The Prime Minister's foreign and defence adviser must be available 24/7, have a gold-plated Rolodex, and exceptional foreign affairs experience.

JESSICA BRUNO (feat. COLIN ROBERTSON)

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper has brought in Christine Hogan as his acting foreign and defence policy adviser to replace Claude Carrière, who moved out of the position last month to become associate deputy minister at Agriculture Canada.

Ms. Hogan, who is usually the assistant secretary to the Cabinet, foreign and defence policy, stepped into the key role temporarily after the departure of Mr. Carrière on July 11.

A permanent replacement has yet to be named and the PCO has been tight-lipped on when that would happen, but former diplomats say that the next person to step into the role must be knowledgeable, well-connected, and experienced.

"It's a very, very important position. It's also a very difficult one, quite sincerely," said NDP MP Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Maire, Que.).

Prior to being elected, Ms. Laverdière worked in the foreign service. She has worked abroad and in Ottawa as the contact between Foreign Affairs, Parliament and Cabinet. Her work brought her into contact with the Prime Minister's foreign and defence adviser at the time, Claude Laverdure, who served in the role from 2002 to 2003.

"I think it needs somebody who is already very familiar with most of these issues. This is not the kind of job that I think that you can learn on the job: too many issues, too much complexity," Ms. Laverdière said of the advisory role.

The foreign policy and defence adviser also needs to have the trust and confidence of the Prime Minister, said Colin Robertson, a former Canadian diplomat who served in the United States and is now a distinguished senior fellow at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs.

"This is a person who will be talking to Tom Donilon, the national security adviser to the [U.S.] President, to the equivalent in British Prime Minister David Cameron's office," he explained.

The new foreign policy adviser also needs to bring a golden Rolodex to the job, said both Ms. Laverdière and Mr. Robertson. He or she needs to be in touch not only with their counterpart in other countries, but with experts in defence, trade, the environment, the business community, NGOs and other levels of government.

These contacts are generally cultivated by serving in a Canadian Embassy abroad, said Mr. Robertson.

Ms. Laverdière said that time working outside of Canada is a key asset for anyone filling the role.

"Otherwise not only is the learning curve too steep, but also I think that to really have a grounded understanding of what Canada's role abroad is and can be, I personally think you need direct experience," she said.

Ms. Hogan joined the Privy Council Office in 2010, where she worked under Mr. Carrière. This is her second time working at the PCO. She also worked in the office from 2004 to 2006, when she was the Prime Minister's adviser on Cabinet and policy priorities.

Though in the past year at PCO she has travelled to Colorado Springs and Nunavut to take part in defence meetings and exercises, she does not have any direct experience in DFAIT.

Ms. Hogan has also worked at CIDA, where she was vice-president of strategic policy and performance.

As it's up to the Prime Minister who gets the job it's possible that Ms. Hogan may be given the job permanently but typically the adviser has that important on-the-ground experience, said Mr. Robertson. In the long-term, Ms. Hogan could be posted abroad, and bring that experience to the PCO with her.

Prominent ambassadors and assistant deputy ministers in Foreign Affairs or Defence stock the list of likely candidates for the permanent job, said Mr. Robertson.

Though not necessarily up for the job, someone like Jim Wright, the Canadian high commissioner to the United Kingdom; Marc Lortie, the Canadian ambassador to France; or Keith Christie, the assistant deputy minister for global issues at Foreign Affairs, would have the right mix of experience and seniority, Mr. Robertson said.

Prime Minister Harper will choose his adviser after a series of interviews with one or two individuals put forward by the bureaucracy. The adviser's office is in the Blackburn Building on Sparks Street.

"There has to be a sense of camaraderie between the two, because you will work and travel with that person, it's not just a technocrat," said Mr. Robertson.

Traditionally, the adviser also needs to be available at all hours of the day or night.

"Under Paul Martin, for example, Jonathan Fried, who was in that position, was often called at any time of night by the Prime Minister, 'Hey, what do you think of this?' or 'I want you to come in and talk to me about this,'" he said.

The tenor of the job, as well as some of its responsibilities, are largely based on the character of the Prime Minister that adviser is serving.

"My sense is that Harper keeps greater distance from the public service. He deals first with the political assistants, certainly with the Clerk to a degree, certainly with the foreign policy advisor on foreign affairs, but it is more correct, it's not quite as familiar, as it has been," said Mr. Robertson.

The job of foreign and defence policy adviser to the Prime Minister is not the only senior position in the bureaucracy that's seen changes recently. Last week, the government announced that Lysanne Forand, who was senior associate deputy minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, and the chief operating officer for Service Canada, is now president of Shared Services Canada, a just-created organization tasked with streamlining the government's IT.

Moving up to fill her place at HRSDC is Karen Jackson, who was the department's associate deputy minister. Replacing her is Ronald Parker, who was previously HRSDC's assistant deputy minister.

Also currently vacant is the presidency of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. Former president Nicole Jauvin retired July 11.

Canada Revenue Agency is also looking for a new deputy commissioner after the departure of Lyse Ricard on July 11. The position is a governor-in-council appointment and consists of up to two five-year terms.

In recent years, the job of foreign and defence policy advisor has also been increasingly low-profile.

"As the foreign policy adviser, you're seldom seen and almost never heard" by the public, said Mr. Robertson. He noted that Mr. Carrière, who is now a deputy minister at Agriculture and Agri-Food, would only give rare background briefings to the press at the prime minister's behest.

In the Trudeau era, adviser Ivan Head operated more like a roving ambassador and was unafraid to voice opinions that were sometimes at odds with the official Foreign Affairs line. Also under former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, adviser Bob Fowler held a higher profile than recent advisers like Mr. Laverdure or Michael Kergin, said Mr. Robertson.

The foreign policy adviser may not often be seen publicly but he or she is at the prime minister's side during international summits, a responsibility that has increased with the creation of the G-20 and in recent years with the onset of the recession, Mr. Robertson noted.

The adviser needs to have a knack for focusing on both the minutia of complex issues and their larger significance, said Ms. Laverdière.

"When they say, 'You can't see the forest for the trees,' this is a job where you need to both know the trees and be able to see the forest," Ms. Laverdière said.

The adviser also needs to use their deep background knowledge to "bring coherence to policy" when explaining possible policy decisions to the PM, said Ms. Laverdière.

In the end though, it's up to the Prime Minister to call the shots.

"I think that somebody with a wealth of experience and judgment might be able to give a cautionary word once and a while. What happens with it is another story of course," she said.