

Traditional Government vs. Mohawk Nation Government

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When proceeding down the path of political unification, a dispute over terminology is almost unavoidable among camps that have coexisted in conditions of mistrust and anger. Likewise, in order to consolidate and sustain a unified body, it is essential for these camps to have, without obscurity, a clear understanding of our universal objective as well as the plan to achieve it. Instead of waiting until our progress becomes bottlenecked due to a misunderstanding of terminology, this inevitability might as well be entertained now rather than later. Let us then analyze and interpret the term “traditional government” and its implications in the Kahnawake experience.

While this author cannot question the validity and virtue of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake’s (MCK) declaration on returning to traditional government, some consideration must go into understanding exactly what each faction envisions as a return to traditional government; particularly the MCK since they currently hold the pot of gold. Traditional government is a vague term that has the potential compatibility for many different interpretations and implications.

There is speculation raised by some community members who believe a return to traditional government simply means that the MCK will merely reformat its existing elected council structure by adopting and mocking certain aspects contained in the Kaianere’kó:wa (the Great Law of Peace). Adding some evidence to this presumption are the contents of the 2000 Operational Resource Manual of the MCK, which outlines the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions for new community government as well as a transitional plan.

This document is very concise, logical, and feasible and is in fact worthy of Haudenosaunee support with exception to one essential factor; or rather one neglected factor. It does not contain any provision that attempts to reestablish an official relationship to the Mohawk Nation and the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. Indeed, there is cause for concern if this is in fact an objective of the MCK, for it may deprive the Mohawk Nation citizen from his or her inherited national status and rights.

By creating a community government outside the Confederacy’s executive and legislative infrastructure, as provided for in the Kaianere’kó:wa, Kahnawa’kehró:non as a collective entity cannot expect to unlock and enjoy the inalienable sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Mohawk Nation that is currently under the sole custodianship and guardianship of the Haudenosaunee and those under its federal umbrella. Furthermore, Kahnawake without the Confederacy has no historical claim or justification to establish a jurisdiction (political, economic, or policing) independent or separate from the Government of Canada.

Perhaps under a Seven Nations of Canada legal defense strategy, the MCK can initiate some kind of attempt at asserting an independent jurisdiction and de-facto traditional

government for the people of Kahnawake. This action can even unlock the Seignury of Sault St. Louis among other unsubstantial benefits. This style of traditional government can feature the same status that was employed by Kahnawa'kehró:non during the reign of the Life Chiefs and the Seven Nations. Although this previous governing structure, which died with the imposition of the Indian Act, resembled a traditional structure containing 3 deliberating parties and a clan system; it was never an institution of the Kaianere'kó:wa and was certainly outside the joined hands of the Haudenosaunee.

The slogan of the Canada Kahnawake Relations team is "Confirming Kahnawake Jurisdiction of Kahnawake Territory." This statement seems to be the philosophical basis of the MCK's motive to return to traditional government. This philosophy not only severs Kahnawake from the Indian Act but from the Confederacy as well. The symbolic Long House analogy portrayed in the Peacemaker's message depicts that the Haudenosaunee are concentrated into one heart, one body, and one mind; therefore asserting that its political, economic, and social jurisdiction stretches from the Western Door to the Eastern Door. Likewise, under the Kaianere'kó:wa, the Confederacy retains and maintains total jurisdiction over Kahnawake, for the Haudenosaunee claim supercedes that of any government including the Life Chiefs of the Seven Nations and Canada. Succession contrasts the philosophy and spirit of the Kaianere'kó:wa; a rafter that cannot be compromised.

In resolution to this possible oversight in terminology, this author proposes the term, "Mohawk Nation Government at Kahnawake" as a supplement for traditional government. A Mohawk Nation Government implies that a unified traditional institution will be reestablished and further operate under the many institutions embodied within the Kaianere'kó:wa; among them the Mohawk Nation Council and the federal Grand Council of the Six Nation Confederacy. Furthermore, it must be clearly understood in this scenario, a Mohawk Nation Government will operate within the joined hands of the Haudenosaunee, meaning it exists as an official institution or branch of the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. This factor creates a security umbrella for Kahnawake as well as unlocks the national rights and status that are under the sole custody of the Haudenosaunee.

Perhaps one can reasonably argue that this author is analyzing and interpreting far too much into the term traditional government. Perhaps it is mere speculation that does not deserve as much attention as given in the commentary. Therefore, if it is not the objective of the MCK to create an authority independent of the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy, it must then declare its intent for a newly established traditional government to exist within the symbolic Long House of the Great Peace; via the Kaianere'kó:wa. This author recommends that those who believe in the second scenario refer to this so-called "return," as an effort to reestablish a Mohawk Nation Government at Kahnawake.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!