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The Maple Leaf Forever?: Canadian Foreign Policy under US Influence¹

Abstract

Does being truly Canadian inherently mean being on the left? Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper is bent on undermining that notion, thereby changing how Canadians view their own country, as well as how it is seen abroad. He is in part using foreign and defence policy to do so. Harper's Canada has all but abandoned blue-bereted international peacekeeping, celebrated its soldiers after their tough combat stint in southern Afghanistan that for a long while cost them proportionally more casualties than U.S. forces in that country, and sought openly to position itself in the Middle East as Israel's best friend.

Will this new Canadian identity – which some have called “Tory patriotism” – take, though? With respect to Canadian foreign policy there are at least two problems. The first is that the Canadian identity has for decades been deeply tied to a certain view of world affairs and aspiration that the world would be better off if Canadian values were to be implemented. The best illustration of that linkage has historically been none other than peacekeeping, ever since its modern form was devised during the Suez crisis by Lester B. Pearson. Canadians also long promoted the absolute vital role of international law and mediation, again seeing in it a reflection of Canadian identity. The second is that a Canada that plays a rougher, tougher role in the world runs the danger seen – including by its own citizens – as a country that has been Americanized.

Résumé

Être Canadien signifie-t-il être progressiste ? Le premier-ministre Stephen Harper et l'expérience de sa politique étrangère prouvent tout le contraire. Cette expérience prouve que l'image que les Canadiens ont d'eux-mêmes, voire celle que les gens de l'extérieur ont du Canada, a considérablement changé. En fait, Harper utilise la politique extérieure et de défense canadienne pour accentuer cette transformation. Le Canada a abandonné, à toutes fins utiles, son approche traditionnelle du maintien de la paix, a célébré la contribution des soldats canadiens en Afghanistan (dont les pertes ont été, proportionnellement aux forces déployées, plus importantes que celles des États-Unis), et a redéfini l'engagement canadien au Moyen-Orient pour davantage favoriser le soutien du Canada à Israël.

1) This article results from a discussion the two authors recently had at an academic conference. It struck us as we talked how the national identity politics of the Harper government, which had grabbed the attention of one of us, was related to the government's foreign policy, in which the other one of us was especially interested. Reflecting that conversation, Jockel has written the first part of this piece, on identity politics, and David the second, on foreign policy.



Cette nouvelle identité canadienne – que d’aucunes surnomment un «nouveau patriotisme Tory» – va-t-elle perdurer ? Deux problèmes se posent pour la politique étrangère canadienne. Le premier est que cette identité est historiquement liée à une certaine vision des affaires internationales et à une croyance que le monde se porte mieux quand les valeurs canadiennes sont promues et mises en œuvre. La meilleure illustration est le maintien de la paix, une idée qui a émergé de la crise de Suez et de la contribution de Lester B. Pearson. Ainsi, le Canada a depuis longtemps mis de l’avant le rôle absolument vital du droit international et de la médiation dans la résolution des conflits – une autre dimension importante qui reflète cette identité canadienne. Le second problème, et le plus significatif, est que cette nouvelle vision conservatrice d’un Canada plus affirmé dans son identité «musclée» sur la scène internationale confirme tous les risques, aux yeux de ses citoyens comme pour ceux des autres pays, d’un pays davantage américanisé dans la conduite de sa politique étrangère.

“That’s it; I’m moving to Canada,” many a Democrat in the U.S. has been heard to say whenever the Republicans win some election or another. They never do, of course. Still, it says something about the Canadian identity. Does being truly Canadian inherently mean being on the left? Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper is bent on undermining that notion, thereby changing how Canadians view their own country, as well as how it is seen abroad. He is in large part using foreign and defense policy to do so. Harper’s Canada has all but abandoned blue-bereted international peacekeeping, celebrated its soldiers after their tough combat stint in southern Afghanistan that for a long while cost them proportionally more casualties than U.S. forces in that country, and sought openly to position itself in the Middle East as Israel’s best friend.

Americans settled in a while ago to thinking about Canada as a sort of honorary blue state to the north, sort of just like Vermont, or Minnesota, except with French sometimes spoken. Lots of Canadians were not unhappy with this perception and were ready to respond with such helpful observations as Canada was the “kinder, gentler” country that George Bush, père, once pined for or that Canada was pretty much like the United States “except with health care and gun control.” “Peacekeeping, too,” many would be quick to add, peacekeeping being “in the Canadian national DNA,” distinguishing it from the putatively more bellicose and belligerent American national genetic structure. “Canadians keep the peace; Americans fight wars” as the cliché goes that lots of Americans believe, too.

How is Canada different?

To be sure, some Canadians were never reconciled to the softly social democratic definition of the place. David Frum, when he was a Canadian writer living in Toronto, complained twenty years ago that “Social programs are all very well... But they hardly constitute a national identity.” He added, “Medicare did not climb the cliffs to the Plains of Abraham in General Wolfe’s knapsack” (Frum), when Wolfe led the attack in 1760 that all but sealed the British conquest of New France. No, the modern Canadian identity that Americans know and that Harper and his Conservative colleagues today are busy subverting largely dates from a period two centuries later when the Liberal Party of Canada held power in Ottawa,



first under Lester B. Pearson, who was prime minister from 1963 to 1968, and then under Pierre Trudeau, prime minister from 1968 to 1979, and then again after a brief interregnum, from 1980 to 1984.

The Liberals under Pearson and Trudeau were responding to challenges they perceived from three distinct directions: Britain, Quebec, and the United States. By 1963 the challenge from Britain was by far the weakest. Canada had long left colonial and dominion status behind it and few Canadians still thought of themselves as British North Americans. Nonetheless, the Liberals sought to further weaken the remaining elements of the Canadian identity that had been inherited from Britain. Above all, the Canadian Red Ensign that bore the Union Flag in its upper left corner was abandoned in 1965 in favor of the Maple Leaf flag so well known today. The legendary Royal Canadian Air Force was split into two parts, named Air Defense Command and Air Transport Command. Similarly, the Royal Canadian Navy had to make do with name, Maritime Command. Royal Mail disappeared from the street corners and delivery vans when it was renamed Canada Post. Dominion Day became Canada Day.

These and other steps that minimized Canada's British and royal heritage were seen by the Liberals as being responsive not only to Canada's increasingly multiethnic makeup, but especially to French-speaking Quebec whose new nationalist and independents' movements threatened the very existence of the country. Just imagine, some Canadians later said, if we were still waiving the Red Ensign or still singing "The Maple Leaf Forever" with its praise of Wolfe as a "dauntless hero" at the time of the first Quebec sovereignty referendum in 1980.

But the Liberals were never for a moment so foolish as to put their faith just in national symbols like flags and anthems while trying to hold the fractious country together. They also sought to strengthen the role of the central government – and thus not the provincial governments – in the lives of Canadians. This led to lots and lots of spending by Ottawa, especially on social programs. As Brian Lee Crowley has put it in a recent work, *Fearful Symmetry: The Fall and Rise of Canada's Founding Values*, Ottawa's adoption of "the state-as-instrument-of-social-justice ploy" led it to playing "my government can spend more than your government" with the Quebec provincial government. Crowley adds, "Even though Ottawa's primary motivation was the battle for Canada's survival in Quebec, it could not limit its response to the Quebec social justice state to that province. A federal government must govern the whole country, and its programs cannot be limited to St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Victoriaville but must extend to St. John's and Victoria as well." In 1964 a Quebec singer released a song that turned, and has remained, wildly popular, whose poetic refrain was "my country isn't a country it's winter" (Vigneault). Decades later, after Ottawa had made its spending programs a key element of the Canadian identity, English Canadian was turned it into "my country isn't a country, it's national health insurance."

A handy thing about national health insurance and about a robust Canadian welfare state in general was that they could be used to distinguish Canada from the United States – as long as the fact was overlooked that for most of the twentieth century the U.S. welfare state had actually been more robust than the Canadian one. The same eventually was true about Canadian participation in international peacekeeping, although not at first. Pearson had invented the modern form of UN peacekeeping when he was Canada's foreign minister during the 1956 Suez crisis. A furious Eisenhower, surprised by the Anglo-French seizure of the canal with Israeli support, insisted that the British, French and Israelis withdraw. "Pearson's peacekeep-



ers” were sent in by the UN to monitor the truce between the belligerents and Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Canadians were not impressed. In the following Canadian general election Pearson and the Liberal Party were promptly punished by the Canadian electorate whose Anglophile sentiments were not yet dead. Instead being taken with the invention of peacekeeping, they were incensed at the lack of support for the Mother Country.

Canadians soon changed their minds, however, becoming, starting in the 1960s, vastly enthusiastic about peacekeeping. The Liberals made peacekeeping an official priority of the Canadian military in 1964. That enthusiasm only deepened as Canada, for several decades, joined each and every UN peacekeeping operation, becoming the only country to be able to make the claim. Ottawa officialdom responded further not only with speeches about peacekeeping in Canada’s DNA but by building a national peacekeepers monument in a prominent spot in downtown Ottawa and then, in a telling indicator when it comes to national identity, put images from the monument on the back of the 10 dollar bill. The internalization of peacekeeping as part of the Canadian identity went so far that many Canadians came to see it a vocation the country was called for, reflecting not only the special gifts and training of the Canadian military, but Canada’s own “virtual neutrality” and even its status as a “moral superpower” that could not only keep the peace but broker it honestly, too. A leading Canadian pollster, Allan Greg, summarized public opinion a couple of years ago with the observation that “active military combat is just not consistent with Canadians’ self-image of what we should be doing abroad. For good or ill, we continue to see ourselves as kind of the Baden-Powell of the world community, doing good deeds, not getting killed or killing others” (qtd. in Byfield). Canadian scholars, especially historians, have inveighed and fulminated against what they call the “peacekeeping myth,” pointing out that the Canadian military always believe that a well-trained combat soldier was the best peacekeeper, that Canada joined peacekeeping efforts not as a neutral, but a Western power, and that while Canada might have done a lot of peacekeeping it had never brokered a single peace. But it was to no avail.

A new Canadian identity in foreign policy?

Stephen Harper came into office in 2006 committed to what Lawrence Martin, an Ottawa journalist and one of Harper most acerbic critics, called “Tory patriotism, one predicated on symbols and traditions. This was central to his goal of taking the flag away from the Liberal party...” Thus far he has avoided taking on the greatest part of the Liberal legacy, namely the Canadian welfare state and its most distinctive element, national health insurance. This no doubt reflects in part the relatively weak position he found himself in after the elections of 2006 and 2008 as the leader of minority governments and may change over the next few years in the wake of the majority Harper finally won in the 2011 election. Lots of Canadians are betting that while he will not openly go after national health insurance, he will let the provincial governments pull it apart to the point that national standards begin to disappear.

Other symbols and traditions have been easier for Harper to emphasize. To a lot of people’s surprise, the first flag he tried to take away was not the Canadian one, but rather Quebec’s fleur-de-lysée. At his behest, the House of Commons passed a resolution in 2006 recognizing



that Quebeckers constituted a “nation within a united Canada.” Trudeau would have been appalled; a bedrock principle of his approach to Canadian unity was that there was only the Canadian nation, some of whose citizens spoke English and some French.

Harper also reversed the Liberal de-emphasis on the monarchy. At the government’s direction, the queen’s image appeared once again in immigration and other government materials, and Canadian diplomatic missions around the world. With evident satisfaction the prime minister received the queen in Canada for a pre-60th anniversary tour, and the duke and duchess of Cambridge for a post-wedding tour. In 2011 the Royal Canadian Air Force and Royal Canadian Navy were given back their names. As Bryan Evans, one professorial critic of these steps, correctly noted, “This is very much an ideological, cultural campaign. It is not so much about the monarchy in and of itself. It is about a reshaping of the Canadian identity along Conservative lines” (qtd. in McQuigge).

In that sense, foreign policy has afforded Harper and the Conservatives another opportunity to shape that identity.

Once upon a time, there used to be an independent Canadian foreign policy, quite distinct from its Southern neighbour and quite recognized in the world as an (original) Canadian imprint on world affairs: a middle power prone to consensus-building, respect for international law, playing a mediator and bridge builder role, determined to be a peacekeeper and looking forward to promote human security rather than national security. Under liberal leadership in the 1990s, Canadian foreign policy usually followed and respected a long post World War Two tradition of liberal internationalism as a reflection of Canadian values. Then in this last decade, Canada has somewhat “gone wild” with a more conservative and more US oriented international outlook than it has ever been the case in its history. Not that Canadians are no more what they used to be: generous, humanitarian, and culturally sensitive to multiethnic realities of the world. They still are. But something has indeed happened to Canada’s DNA and shows in fact that the country is now resolutely more American than ever in the conduct of its foreign policy.

A former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, used to say that America was like an Elephant for us: when it trampled the field, Canadians were feeling like a Mouse, not feeling at all that secure and having at times to distance themselves from American positions in world affairs. For Canada, diplomatic flexibility has often been a way to express sovereignty. Trudeau, like his liberal successors, did push a Canadian agenda, sometimes at odds with the American agenda (Canada recognizes Cuba for four decades now; the US are still punishing it through the embargo). Jean Chrétien was the last prime minister to actually say “no” to the US when he refused in 2003 to approve of the invasion of Iraq. From there, Canadian foreign policy drastically changed. It has shifted to align itself more and more on US positions, thanks largely to the arrival of a conservative government in Ottawa in early 2006. Not that the conservatives are wholly responsible for that change: 9/11 is what undoubtedly provoked a seismic rupture in Canada’s role in world affairs, first under the liberals (but who at least seemed to resist some of the American aftershocks). New issues between Canada and its Southern neighbour all of a sudden irrupted on the agenda and brought about significant changes: border relations, involvement in Afghanistan, treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo, increase in defence spending, aggressive rhetoric on security issues, most visible in the Arctic, less interest in disarmament negotiations, a national security agenda... Those are examples of significant



issues on which one could argue that 9/11 changed the image (if not contents) of Canadian foreign policy in the last ten years – and thanks to a certain “G. W. Bush” imprint on world affairs. It did not need to be that way according to a great number of critics who have resented that reorientation; it shows, said the realists (and conservatives), that Canadian foreign and defence policy has always reflected its geography.

The Maple Leaf “distinctiveness”

The Canadian identity has always been tied to a certain view of world affairs and aspiration that this world would be better off if Canadian values were to be implemented. The best illustration of that linkage has historically been the initiative of the “blue helmets” promoted by former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson after the Suez crisis of 1956. Thanks to Canada, the world (still) has today peacekeepers recruited by the UN to sustain or secure ceasefires in certain conflicts. Canadians have also always promoted the absolute vital role of international law and mediation, again a reflection of Canadian identity. Moreover, certain issues (like free trade) negotiated and implemented with the US were presented as optimal for Canadian interests and back then, in the mid-1980s, the conservative government was insistent that these issues were not contradicting traditional Canadian foreign policy values or threatening the Canadian identity. Today it seems that no one in Ottawa even bothers expressing those caveats or concerns for this kind of “distinctiveness” of the Maple Leaf. Canadians are either resigned to the idea that today Canada’s international outlook is more American, or approving this wholesale shift because of threats to its security (reminded indeed each time Canada foils a terrorist plot). The end result nevertheless is that the Canadian mouse need not fear the American elephant anymore: it is firmly embedded with American foreign policy to a larger extent than ever. Even with the administration of Barack Obama the equation has not changed. Some would say, not too politely, that Canada has “gone native,” that it is outdoing the Americans in the promotion of a US foreign policy model for Canada. Of course, this is a caricature but it has an element of truth in it.

One fundamental reason for this result is the fact that Canadian foreign policy is more than ever over-centralized – formulated and quasi implemented – by the office of the Prime Minister, with often a political agenda very much at odds with bureaucrats of the Department of Foreign Affairs. That particular ministry had throughout its ascendancy, since the Westminster statutes that gave Canada in 1931 its independent foreign policy, a usually large role in defining Canadian international positions. At times there were periods of decisional recession, as when Trudeau took over in 1969 in developing new orientations, but never before has the Department suffered from decisional annihilation as is the case now under the current conservative government. Morale is low, influence next to nil and belief in a distinct Canadian outlook on the international scene is not particularly felt. Canadian foreign policy has become the personal property of the Prime Minister and, although he is perfectly entitled to do so, the consequences are devastating for the Canadian traditions and may permanently impair the return to those fundamental values.

Someone who used to observe Canadian foreign policy from the vantage point of twenty or thirty years ago would be struck in 2012 with the significance of the transformation: with



regards to, first and foremost, the treatment of Canadian Guantanamo prisoner Omar Khadr, but also with respect to Canadian views on security and defence, in particular the issue of the Arctic, disarmament, the so-called peace missions, and the Canadian role in mediating (or not) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They have been a clear illustration of the “Americanization” of Canadian foreign policy. Let us see how.

The Khadr effect

The treatment of Taliban prisoners and Al Qaeda terrorists became a thorn in Canada/US relations after 2002 when the issue of what to do with them irrupted on the agenda. The fate of Canadian prisoner Omar Khadr, as the whole world knows, a young “child soldier” made prisoner during an operation in Afghanistan and who was imprisoned for some ten years in Guantanamo after being picked up by American soldiers, is the epitome of everything that goes wrong now with Canada’s foreign policy. The creators of Canadian foreign policy, such as Raoul Dandurand, Lester Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, must have turned themselves in their graves when watching this miserable story unfold. Why did Canada not take the young man back and put him on civilian trial like most other Western countries did with their expatriate Guantanamo prisoners, a question everyone but Stephen Harper asked in Canada? Every international institution, from Amnesty to Freedom House and international law organizations, pleaded with Ottawa to repatriate Khadr, expressing particularly their concerns that the imprisonment of a child (back in 2002) violated the spirit if not the law regulating the treatment of prisoners. To top it all, even Pentagon military lawyer designated to defend Khadr formulated the same request. No rationale other than personal pique and ideological stance from the prime minister can explain the reasons why the government refused to comply. Recently, a memo divulgated by the press disclosed that the Minister of Public Security endorsed the use of information obtained under torture from foreign sources by agents of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services. This gave Canada a black-eyed reputation throughout the world.

Back to the future... and national security

It used to be that Canada was viewed as an innovative place with regards as to how to view security and how to promote it in the context of liberal Canadian values. The Khadr affair would never have occurred in the 1990s if Canadian foreign policy had been associated with a humanitarian – human security – agenda. One of the most noteworthy contributions of Canada on the international scene has most certainly been the doctrine of “human security” that former Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy pushed through in the mid-1990s. This paradigm shift in orientation led Canada to reconsider how and to what effect security for individuals could be better served in the world. That transformation might have been naive to some extent, but it reflected the “good reputation” of Canada abroad. And Canadians were not alone: Scandinavian countries, Japan, somewhat Spain, were amongst those that sup-



ported this change. If nothing else, 9/11 not only killed thousands of Americans; it also killed the agenda of human security in Canada. The “national security” agenda pushed vigorously by the W. Bush administration spilled over in Canada, co-opting (some would say forcing) a wholesale redefinition of Canadian security policies. The national security doctrine is particularly back with a vengeance ever since. Rather than putting the emphasis and resources into alleviating causes and consequences of armed conflicts (as the liberal governments used to do in the 1990s), national security has brought the emphasis on traditional objectives and hardware-oriented means. That is: securing militarily the sovereign territory of Canada, its borders (a big priority), providing with more and better intelligence, and foremost giving the military a much increased financial envelope to perform new missions assigned (as in Afghanistan). Not that taken alone any of these changes were revolutionary or surprising, but taken altogether they conveyed the impression if not the reality that, from now on, the only agenda in town was going to be the American agenda. Particularly, the additional resources allocated for defence in the past decade, that almost doubled the budget allocated to the military from prior to after 9/11, have certainly been motivated not only by the need to please the Canadian armed forces but the American ones as well. As in America, one of the consequences of that decision has been to deplete even more the short staffed department of external affairs that barely holds the ground in carrying on daily Canadian diplomacy. To this day, there has not been a debate in Canada on what Canadians want to accomplish on the international scene – other than basically react to American sets of issues. No white paper, no public discussion, no commission to establish consensus. That is regrettable and precludes real debate. It would have been better to define first the objectives of Canadian international policies (diplomatic, military and developmental), taking into account the needs of its Southern neighbour, then to decide the means and resources to be provided and distributed between departments and agencies. Unfortunately, the cart was put before the horses. Defence got the big chunk of resources, Foreign Affairs and CIDA (the development agency) the smaller rest. It used to be the other way around for most of two decades prior to 9/11. This has had a significant influence on the Canadian identity in the world and the way as well Canadians conceive now the purpose of Canada’s role in world affairs. A good testimony of change in priorities is the debate (or lack of) on the decision to buy the planned sixty five F35 aircrafts to renew the air force fleet of jet fighters in the next decade – and which is being reviewed for lack of certainty of the real costs of that aircraft. The unilateral decision was taken completely out of the public light, with no public contracting tenders, with no parliamentary committees having the chance to debate if Canada needed at all that type of aircraft and that type of unknown expense. The decision was met with apathy and acceptance, except for the ever-lasting debate across the country over the benefits for regional economies. Again, this is a perfect example of foreign and defence policy gone wild under the current government. The conclusive but ill-debated argument here has been that Canada needs to renew the fleet to ensure sovereignty and fight wars the way that the Americans do. What about a Canadian content or imprint to that decision? It seems hardly to matter.



The Arctic: “Use it or lose it”

Another great illustration of an “Americanized” foreign policy has been the Harper policy in the Canadian Arctic and the circumpolar world. Even if Canada has released a statement on Canada’s Foreign Policy in the Arctic that stresses the importance of maintaining Canadian territorial integrity and international cooperation between Arctic states (both are traditional Canadian policy priorities in the High North), Stephen Harper still favours a “use it or lose it” approach when it comes to dealing with Arctic affairs. His cold war discourse on Canada’s vulnerability in the North fallaciously gives the impression that this country needs to boost its military capabilities (and presence) to defend itself against outside traditional security threats. Russia has often been suggested by the Prime Minister (and the Defence Minister) as a possible threat to Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic, forcing Russian officials to openly and vigorously denounce Ottawa’s outdated approach. Some officials have also used the “use it or lose it” rhetoric to justify, for example, the decision to buy F35 aircrafts, useful for any possible intervention in the North. The government has also announced its intention to build six to eight ice strengthened Navy ships to patrol the Arctic waters for defence purposes, instead of investing proper budget to support Coast Guard activities (policing, research) and capabilities (new ships) in the Great North. The human dimension to Arctic security is without any doubt the most pressing aspects of issues when dealing with that region today – a dimension that the Harper government tends to neglect if not dismiss.

Same with disarmament and arms control: what used to be international attempts by Canada to promote innovative and relentless negotiations in the arenas of conventional and non-conventional weaponry has gone today by the wayside if they have not entirely faded. One would be hard pressed to imagine today another Ottawa Landmines Treaty, where Canada vigorously took the lead on this issue in the mid-1990s and which resulted in 1997 with the historic signing of that Treaty. Maybe it was a unique experience, but it has been replicated since by Norway with the conclusion of a treaty interdicting the use of cluster munitions. In this arena, Canada should have over the past decade looked more like its Scandinavian ally and less like its reluctant Southern neighbour.

Abandonment of traditional roles

If there has been one issue on which Canada has always been innovative and vocal, it is peacekeeping. Here too its foreign policy has come under heavy US influence. On one hand, Canada, not unlike many other developed countries, has devoted less and less manpower to traditional “blue helmet” missions. It has left the field now occupied by less developed States, a strange twist to the history of Canada’s internationally recognized invention. On the other hand, Peacekeeping has been replaced by the far more muscular military enforcement which gave Canada in Afghanistan its main “peace mission” abroad (the Harper government defended the decision taken early 2005 to go and police Kandahar). The mission has now ended (500 soldiers remaining to train the Afghan army) and no one knows when and where the military will next intervene. Canadians will remain hesitant to agree to con-



duct those types of missions and skeptical as well that exporting democracy and nation-building can lead to “victory”. Afghanistan, like Libya, most certainly has pointed to a major doctrinal shift in Canadian foreign policy towards “big league” missions. In other words, it is going to be hard to go back to the less glamorous missions, as attested by the apparent refusal of the Canadian government to take up the leadership of the peacekeeping mission in Congo in 2011. There is clearly a “peace fatigue” here: if Canada is in fact tired, what does that say to the rest of the world and to future peacekeeping aspirants? If Canada quits, who will be next?

Another area where Canada’s distinctiveness in international relations has undoubtedly brought an important contribution is its role as mediator and bridge-builder in the Middle East conflict, with the long tradition of Canada always promoting a balanced resolution to that conflict. To a certain extent, after the crises in Southern Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008 as well as 2012, Canadian diplomacy has been less than neutral and has expressed more openly than ever a pro-Israeli stance. One could argue that Canadian diplomacy has even strengthened the ideological stance of the Bush administration or thereafter remained on the right of Barack Obama’s slightly more “leftist” position on the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation. Ottawa has expressed often the right of Israel of self-defence, which is obvious, but at the same token has not expressed anything regarding the need for sustained dialogue, mediation, resolution and the right for decent human security for Palestinians. What is striking about the change in Canadian diplomacy in this area of the world is its quasi abandonment of any pretence to an even-handed position. In: the threat of terrorists, radical Islamists and rogue States; out: the hopes of deprived populations, public diplomacy towards Muslims and forging coalitions of friendly countries to bring about peace. If there is one region in the world where the old Samaritan reputation of Canadian diplomacy has suffered the most, it has to be the Middle East. That is regrettable because Canada did play more than a useful role in alleviating the consequences of difficult and intractable conflicts; it also initiated ideas and policies to help. Canada now reacts, mostly through a national security lens. If things were not already bad enough, they have worsened to an extent never seen when three years ago, a greatly reputed Canadian organization – Rights and Democracy – was put under almost direct monitoring by the Harper government because of its affiliation with Palestinian organizations that promoted human security and its (totally unproven) anti-Israeli analyses. The domestic debate surrounding the activities of that world-recognized organization was so turbulent that it probably undermined for a long time its work and impetus. Then, we learned that the newly appointed person in charge of public relations had defended war criminals at the ICC! It may sound trivial, but those events have never been seen before. They go some way in showing how Canada’s approach to international affairs has regrettably been altered under the Harper government.

Canadian foreign policy might revert to the traditional values and policies that have sustained it and made it distinct over the years, especially in light of the (rare) fact that an American administration is now often seen acting to the left of the Canadian government. That fact alone says plenty about the state of disarray of Canadian diplomacy. Even without the means, the Mouse seems to have become even tougher than the Elephant.



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