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**Canada and the World: We Can Do Better**, by Paul Heinbecker<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

Today, I want to talk to you about Canadian foreign policy writ large, about what our government thinks and says and does in our names and about how effectively it defends our interests and represents our values.

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In my judgment, the government is learning on the job, and growing in maturity and sophistication, but it still struggles to climb out of the hole that in its initial inexperience and ideological certitude it has dug for itself.

### **The Government's Foreign Policy: The Theory**

To formulate a reasonably accurate assessment of current Canadian foreign policy, it is important to examine the precepts that guide it.

This government tends to take moral stands in favour of fundamental values, including democracy, free enterprise and individual freedom.

It also believes that it not only has the right to stand with Canada's allies, but the duty to do so, and the responsibility to put "hard power" behind its international commitments.

Depending on who is counting and what is being counted, the government appears to be guided by a few fundamental foreign policy beliefs,

1. That as Conservatives they take a moral stand, with Canada's allies, in favour of the fundamental values of democracy, free enterprise and individual freedom.
2. That this moral stand gives Canada both the right and the duty to stand with its allies, and the responsibility to put "hard power" behind its international commitments.
3. That they are carrying out a principled foreign policy, not the alleged go-along- to-get-along policies of its presumed feckless predecessor,
4. And, that at the same time, they are more hard-headed in the calculation of Canadian interests, especially economic interests, than their predecessors were.

To deliver on these beliefs the government appears to have about 10 main foreign policy priorities.

They are heavily economic in orientation in keeping with the Prime Minister's strong emphasis on economic growth and job creation,

And his own personal interest in economics.

- I. Of transcendent importance to the government is its global commerce strategy, which prioritizes the expansion and diversification of Canada's economic relations,
1. by expanding Canada's economic relationships with China, India and Brazil, with which it is concluding numerous issue-specific agreements from investment protection to tourism promotion to nuclear cooperation to student recruitment
  2. by negotiating bilateral trade and investment agreements with the European Union, Korea, Thailand and Japan, and some smaller countries largely in the Western hemisphere,
  3. And by seeking international support for Canadian access to the nascent Trans-Pacific Partnership, despite the obstacle of the government's stated continuing support for Canada's agricultural supply management system.

The government hopes that these economic developments will generate billions of new dollars for Canada's economy

- II. Of near equal priority, at least in principle, is the reinforcement of the Canada-United States relationship. This the government is doing

1. by concluding and implementing the agreement on Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness and the Canada–United States Regulatory Cooperation Council; and
2. by defending Canadian business against Congressional protectionist measures, particularly "Buy American" provisions of stimulus spending.

To the chagrin of Canadian continentalists, and the relief of Asian hands and globalists, the government's approach to the US is essentially one of muddling through, solving problems where they arise, rather than one of grand gestures, e.g., seeking a customs union or some other form of greater statutory integration into the US economy.

- III. Closely related to the first two priorities of the government is the third, supporting oil/tar sands development at home and promoting Canadian resource industries abroad by means of
1. Aggressive courting of foreign, including Chinese investment in the tar sands and targeted advocacy in the United States and Europe to blunt criticism of the oil/tar sands apparent disproportional contribution to climate change emissions,
  2. Strong support of the Keystone pipeline south to the Gulf coast,

3. Facilitation of the development of the Asia-Pacific Gateway through Vancouver, which had been begun under the previous government, in order to enable greater trade with the booming markets of Asia
4. And, clearing the way for approval of the Northern Gateway pipeline project by changing the regulatory framework and processes,

IV. Globally, the government seeks to contribute to

1. exploit summitry, particularly the G20, to advance Canada's interests especially in reforming international financial governance and institutional innovation,

notably reform of the International Monetary Fund and creation of the new Financial Stability Board,

of which Mark Carney is the Canadian chairman of the Basel-based Financial Stability Board.

2. promote macroeconomic coordination and fiscal consolidation, largely through the G20

V. As regards international security and stability,

1. the government is rebuilding and deploying the Canadian Forces, increasing the military budget by about 30 % since coming to office, current cuts notwithstanding
2. strengthening Afghanistan's security, rule of law and human rights protections, in cooperation with the UN and NATO;
3. intervening in Libya, also in cooperation with NATO and the UN,
4. Continuing to implement the global partnership agreement, with a pledge of a further \$367 million to prevent the proliferation of nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) launched by a previous government at the Kanaskis G8
5. But cutting back on the effectiveness of Canadian diplomacy .

VI. On development assistance, Canada has prioritized aid effectiveness, pursuing policies to

1. Increase environmental sustainability
2. Promote equality between women and men
3. Strengthen governance institutions and practices, and
4. Multilaterally, to carry out its pledge made at the Muskoka G8 to contribute over a billion dollars to lead the international effort to improve maternal, newborn and child health in developing countries.

- VII. Regionally, the government has increased the priority it attaches to Latin America, where it is seeking to
1. support democracy and institution-building in Latin America,
  2. to address international drug trafficking and organized crime , in particular in cooperation with Mexico, Central America and Haiti,
  3. and, regarding resource industries, to tailor aid projects to cooperate with Canadian extractive industries operating abroad, especially in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and central Asia
- VIII. In the Arctic, the government is promoting Canadian sovereignty
1. By working to resolve boundary issues and securing as full international recognition as possible recognition for the extent of Canada's extended continental shelf, and
  2. Strengthening the operations and policy role of the Arctic Council.
- IX. And last, but not least in its impacts, the government is stoutly supporting the Government of Israel

A fair assessment of the Harper government's record would give it credit for the effective way it has employed Canada's G20 membership to respond to the



international financial crisis and consequent recession, using the exceptional expertise in the Department of Finance and Bank of Canada to promote sound G20 decisions.

The government increased spending on Canada's military by over 40 percent, a necessary correction that allowed the Canadian forces to take on more demanding roles.

It steadily maintained Canada's efforts in Afghanistan and made a sensible and responsible compromise in shifting to a training mission there.

The government responded to the Haiti earthquake quickly, using the refurbished military to good, if expensive, effect.

Although re-building has been disappointingly slow, the government has taken a leadership role in the longer-term effort to rebuild that country.

Positive, as well, has been the Harper government's promoting Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic and its work with the four other Arctic coastal states to map the underwater topography to facilitate a negotiated outcome of overlapping claims, although the government's Cold War-era rhetoric about Russian bomber threats has been bizarre and discordant.

The Harper government kept the Liberal's promise to double aid to Africa (albeit from a lower base, and then froze the entire Canadian aid budget) and at the Huntsville G8 took the initiative to establish a maternal and children's health fund; its attempts to exclude abortion services from fund coverage sparked public criticism by Secretary of State Clinton and a rebuke from the respected medical journal Lancet that called our policy "hypocritical and unjust".

Further, the government embarked on major free trade negotiations with a number of countries, including India and the European Union, the last a Canadian goal since the time of Trudeau. It has maintained a workmanlike if not warm relationship with Washington, initiating talks on a common security perimeter that, depending on the details, could help both sides.

### **The Other Side of the Ledger: How Deep Is the Hole the Government Has Dug for Itself – and for US**

In the 2007 Speech from the Throne, the Harper government claimed that "Canada [was] back as a credible player on the international stage."

The speech went on to say that “focus and action, rather than rhetoric and posturing, [were] restoring our influence in global affairs”.

Three years of “focus and action” later and we had lost the 2010 election to the United Nations Security Council.

And we lost badly.

We were abandoned in droves, including by democracies.

For all the bluster out of Ottawa about thugs and tyrants at the UN, they were not the reason for the defeat.

And the loss mattered.

In the first place, the denigration of the UN by the government’s acolytes was inaccurate, as well as unworthy.

Undoubtedly, there are rogue states and tyrants among the UN membership.

But even so 60 percent of the members, 117 out of 194, are electoral democracies, according to Freedom House<sup>2</sup>, the bipartisan US think-tank founded in 1941 by Republican Wendell Willkie and Democrat Eleanor Roosevelt.

Further, by another Freedom House measurement, the citizens of 147 UN member countries out of 194, i.e., 76%, are rated as free or partly free.

Forty-eight UN members, such as China and Afghanistan, are considered not free.

In fact, one of the encouraging developments in recent decades has been the growth in the number of democracies.

Second, Canada as a “tier two” power needs all the vehicles it can get to advance Canadian foreign policy.

We are not a super-power and we cannot act effectively on our own.

Few can.

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<sup>2</sup> See “Freedom in the World 2012”, Freedom House

Losing at the UN deprived us of a key vehicle for advancing our interests.

Third, it is the at the UN Security Council where the world deliberates on and, where possible, disposes of the major security issues of our time.

Consider the issues that have been on the Security Council agenda in the intervening two years:

—the Arab Spring,

the intervention in Libya,

the ongoing tragedy of the Syrian people

the issue of recognition of Palestine as a separate state,

Iran and its nuclear program,

Myanmar, etc., etc.

All were and are of significant interest to Canadians.

The loss was as reliable a barometer as there is of the world's appraisal of the foreign policy of the Harper government.

The world consciously preferred a near bankrupt Portugal to a quite solvent Canada.

How did the government create this state of affairs?

Does it matter?

And can the government surmount the problems it created for itself?

On coming to office, the Conservative front bench had had little exposure to or evident interest in international affairs.

In fact, after 13 years of Liberal Party government, the Conservatives had little experience in governing at the federal level at all.

It did not trust the advice of Canadian foreign policy professionals, and tended to compensate for its own inexperience with ideology and to subordinate substance to communications.

Since Pearson, foreign policy was seen as the extension abroad of national policies.

Under the current government, foreign policy became the importation of foreign issues for partisan purposes.

Diasporas were assiduously cultivated.

Sensitive matters, notably the Middle East, were made into wedge electoral issues, with scant concern for their implications for the domestic or international public peace, or for their significance for Canada's reputation.

This basic modus operandi was, and continues to be, accompanied by greatly centralized decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and extremely tight control over communications.

To the point that Ottawa is referred to by some critics as Pyongyang on the Rideau.

As regards policy, the government has downplayed the UN, more so after the 2010 Security Council election loss.

Canadian participation in UN peacekeeping missions has remained at a low ebb—fifty-third among troop contributors as of March, 2012.

Even counting our well-respected, highly effective and very costly operations in Afghanistan, we scarcely rank in the top 15 participants in UN-sanctioned or UN-led military operations.

To the dismay of many allies and of the many small island states around the world, the government withdrew from the Kyoto agreement and established its own unilateral and less demanding targets and timeframe for reductions, which it seems nonetheless unlikely to fulfill.

On the Middle East, while the government largely maintained the basics of long established Canadian policy, notably support for the two-state solution, it changed the tone, style, and fulcrum point of Canada's policy.

From its first days in office the government uncritically supported Israel as the lone democracy in the Middle East, and evinced little interest or concern about the suffering and the rights of the Palestinians.



While the government portrayed itself as “principled” others saw its positions as otherwise, starting with the Prime Minister’s characterization of the Israeli onslaught in the 2006 war in Lebanon that killed over 1000 Lebanese, mostly civilians according to Human Rights Watch, as “measured”,

and his blaming of the UN for the Israeli bombing of a long-standing and well-marked UN observation post in which a Canadian soldier serving the UN was killed.

The government seemed to condone the Gaza war and raised no concerns with the punitive Israeli blockade of Gaza, nor with its lethal response to the Turkish aid flotilla.

The government also shifted numerous votes at the UN in favour of Israel,

Created imbroglios over the group Rights and Democracy, which it finally terminated,

and cut off Kairos, the ecumenical Canadian aid group.

There was also the shabby mistreatment of Madam Justice Louise Arbour on her retirement as UN Human Rights Commissioner,

the tacit acceptance of Israeli PM Netanyahu's ending of the moratorium on illegal settlement construction in the West Bank and Jerusalem,

the insistence at the Deauville G8 summit that no mention be made in the leaders' final communique of Israel's pre-1967 borders, even though most of the other leaders wanted such a reference

the campaign against the Palestinian effort to join the UN, which it ironically described as unilateral,

the adoption of the Israeli Prime Ministers position on the state of the Iranian nuclear program and the irresponsibility of Iranian leadership, since qualified, at least publically,

the lagging endorsement of the democratic aspirations of 80 million Egyptians, etc., etc.

Despite the tight control of policy by the Prime Minister's Office, or perhaps because of it, managing relationships with other countries has been a particular challenge for this government.

Canada has lacked any coherent strategy in Asia, leading Kishore Mahbubani, a former Singapore ambassador to Canada and the UN, to observe that Canada was one of the few countries that punched below its weight internationally.

It initially downgraded relations with China, partly for human rights reasons but also out of ideological antipathy.

With the state visit to Ottawa of President Hu Jintao on the eve of the G20 summit, the Chinese signaled that they were ready again for business-like relations but little warmth has been evident.

The government distressed Africans by the fact and manner of its down-grading of their continent in our international aid priorities, even if it made remedial efforts to reframe the policy more acceptably.

Nor has the government made many inroads in its new priority in Latin America; indeed Canada has been explicitly excluded, along with the US, from the nascent Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

The Harper government's imposition of visa requirements on Mexicans in 2009 constitutes a case study in mismanaging relations with partners.

The decision, which came with little warning, and with inadequate Canadian resources in Mexico to meet the demand, infuriated the Mexican authorities, inconvenienced scores of thousands of Mexican travelers and cost the Canadian economy hundreds of millions of dollars in lost tourism revenues.

The government likewise mishandled an airline dispute with the UAE, notwithstanding the fact that the Canadian forces had been using a military airbase there for nine years to transship soldiers and materiel to Afghanistan and to repatriate our wounded soldiers to Canada, including on UAE airlines, apparently all free of charge.

Moving to another base has cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

The government's decision to hold two summits in Canada, the G8 summit in Huntsville and the G20 summit in Toronto, rang up a further, breathtaking bill of about a billion dollars.

All of this is not to say that the government's performance has been without its successes.

Not all the responsibility for Canada's slipping reputation can fairly be laid at the Harper government's door. The interest of Canadian governments in the world has flagged with the budget cuts and national unity crises of the 1990s. But it is the Harper government that claimed that, under its leadership, Canada was back. The claim is more aspirational than factual. There is little that has been strategic or imaginative in current policy and much that has been tactical and unambitious, and disappointing.

- X. After largely achieving the goal of doubling development assistance set by the previous government, the government has first flat-lined and now sharply reduced bilateral development assistance funding and concentrated its spending in a shrinking number of countries of focus, largely in the Americas

The government's record pales in comparison, however, to that of, for example, Prime Minister Mulroney who, by this stage in his tenure, had concluded a free trade

agreement, an acid rain agreement and an Arctic passage agreement with Washington, hosted the first ever summit on climate change and led the international effort to impose sanctions on the apartheid regime in South Africa, among many other things.

## Conclusion

Today, we discussed Canadian foreign policy writ large, what our government thinks and says and does in our names and how effectively it defends our interests and represents our values.

In formulating Canadian foreign policy, the government is guided by a few precepts.

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