

Notes for a Presentation by Paul Heinbecker

Of Laurier University, the Balsillie School of

International Affairs, and the Centre for

International Governance Innovation

Ten Steps towards an Effective Canadian

Foreign Policy

To the Rideau Roundtable,

Ottawa

October 7, 2015

Check Against Delivery

Barring more threats to our values by Niqab wearing Muslim women or a not entirely impossible terrorist incident in the fraught domestic climate the Conservative Party has fostered,

we seem very likely to have a new government come October 20.

It will have its job cut out for it.

In the Munk “debate” on foreign policy a couple of weeks ago the barrages of words exchanged masked the central point

-- our foreign policy is in a mess, and not just our multilateral foreign policy but our bilateral foreign policy too.

The laughter that the audience at the Munk debate could not suppress when Prime Minister Harper claimed a good relationship with President Obama illustrates the fallacy at the core of Harper’s foreign policy.

For Harper, saying something makes it so.

Communications beat substance.

Canadian foreign policy has become foreign posturing.

Stagecraft trumps statecraft.

The Harper government has had some successes,
notably the trade agreement with Korea (albeit late)
the (still to be ratified) Comprehensive Economic and Trade
Agreement (CETA) with Europe,
the nascent Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP),
the maternal, newborn and children's health initiative, and
Mr. Baird's campaigns for gay and lesbian rights and against forced
and child marriage.

But, overall, the government's idiosyncratic foreign policy has damaged
Canada's reputation with people engaged day to day in running the world.

Relations with Washington rival the dysfunctional Trudeau-Nixon days.

With Beijing, our second most important and fastest growing economic
partner, the Harper government has been pursuing an on again, off again
light switch diplomacy.

Its interest in Asia generally has been more transactional than strategic, and
we have been excluded from the East Asia Summit.

Harper has needlessly, deeply alienated Mexico, our third largest trading partner.

It has subcontracted our Middle East policy out to Israel's Likud party and closed its mind to Palestinian rights and international law,

and often treated foreign policy generally as an agglomeration of diaspora and constituency interests.

Harper and Baird's posturing on Ukraine has not impressed anyone, certainly not the Russians.

Harper's vaunted Arctic defence priority is window-dressing.

Of the major trade deals the Harper government has negotiated, only the one with Korea is in the bag, albeit several years late.

The Harper government's lecturing the UN has lost us a Security Council election and made us the world's scold.

Beyond just stopping digging, there are several things the next government can do in style and substance to get out of the hole.

First, repair our poor relations with Washington.

The template was created by Prime Minister Mulroney, who hosted eight American Presidential visits in nine years.

It's through such visits that cooperation is forged. (Prime Minister Chrétien received seven Presidential visits.

In the Harper era there have been just three visits thus far, two by President Obama.

Harper has never addressed a joint session of the US Congress.

On the Harper government's top priority, Keystone XL, it has been unable to connect the dots between its own intransigence on climate change and President Obama's reluctance to override environmentalist opposition to the pipeline.

Rather than aligning itself with Senate Republicans and futilely funding advertising campaigns extolling the pipeline's benefits, Ottawa should clean up its climate change act and then approached the Americans with clean hands,

as the Mulroney government did so effectively on acid rain a generation ago.

The new Prime Minister should make early visits to Washington and New York.

He should make clear at the Paris climate change conference in November that Canada recognizes the scale of the problem and will contribute constructively to its resolution.

Second, give Mexico the attention and the respect it merits.

Mexico is our third largest trading partner.

250 thousand Mexicans visit Canada annually.

Or they did, until Ottawa's ham-handed imposition of a visa requirement cut tourism in half, at a cumulative cost to the Canadian economy approaching another billion dollars.

Ottawa's incompetent handling of this file led the Mexican president to cancel his visit to Canada last year.

The new Prime Minister should invite the Mexican President to come to Ottawa.

He should also set a date for the next North American summit,

He should dispense finally with the requirement for a visa for Mexicans to travel to Canada

Third, devise a comprehensive, aggressive strategy to engage constructively and consistently with Asia, starting with China.

Because of the sheer size and unparalleled growth rate of Asian economies, Canadian prosperity depends on increasing our share of their markets.

But our share there is shrinking.

Our major trading partners export more of their production to emerging markets than we do, Australia five times more.

We have wasted time and opportunity and are now playing catch-up.

The new Prime Minister should take up the Chinese offer to negotiate a trade agreement .

He should also explore agreements with India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Eventually, ratification of the TPP will help.

Forth, bring our current posture vis-à-vis Israel-Palestine back into line with Canada's long-standing, fair-minded policies.

Israel's ongoing settlement of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the West Bank is illegal,

and is rendering the two state solution moot.

It is also diluting Israeli democracy.

While we properly continue to support Israel's right to exist, we need to recognize that the Palestinians also exist and have rights.

Ottawa should support not oppose the Palestinian effort to litigate the conflict in the International Criminal Court,

a court created under Canadian leadership.

It is better for the contesting parties to fight in court than in the alleyways of Old Jerusalem, Hebron and in Gaza.

Fifth, on Syria, the new Prime Minister should launch a major effort to resettle refugees,

augment the humanitarian assistance we are giving to the UNHCR, World Food Program, UNICEF and civil society organizations, as well as to the neighbouring countries bearing the brunt of the crises.

He should promote a global solution to the refugee/migrant issue, with definitional reforms, burden-sharing, prevention and protection norms.

Sixth on Ukraine, the Prime Minister should re-align our rhetoric with reality.

We contribute to NATO's efforts but we do not lead them in Ukraine or anywhere else

and we should not pretend we do.

Ottawa has been right to condemn Russia's thinly disguised aggression, but the Harper government's loud talk and little stick impresses no one, least of all the Russians.

And we should take care not to let our hyperbole mislead ordinary Ukrainians into believing that the cavalry is coming.

It isn't.

Bolstering the Ukrainians is one thing.

Bull-shitting them is another.

The West, Canada included, will not fight World War III over Ukraine, except possibly by inadvertence and miscalculation,

Seventh, get real and gear back on self-esteem;

Canada is not a super power, energy or otherwise, nor a moral paragon.

Our self-congratulations on values and principles are given the lie when we turn a blind eye to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank,

preemptively exempt Israel from the Fourth Geneva Convention in the last Gaza clash,

all but advocate war against Iran,

pursue arms deals with Wahhabist Saudi Arabia,

and court the Gulf states and Egypt even as they perpetrate major human rights abuses.

Ottawa's reluctance to address climate change effectively, its renunciation of the desertification treaty and, unique in NATO, its failure to ratify the Small Arms Treaty, are seen by allies and others as unprincipled and irresponsible. We should reverse policy on all three.

Eighth, recognize that globalization makes cooperation with others indispensable.

Ottawa should re-engage with the United Nations,

whose Charter and institutions, treaties, laws and norms constitute the globe's governance ecosystem.

The new government should respond to the US-led call for advanced countries to re-engage in peacekeeping

especially with force multipliers that can be Canada's value-added.

Harper's truculence vis-à-vis the UN has stood in stark contrast to the behaviour of our allies, and only harmed Canada.

The Prime Minister should pay an early visit to the UN, or invite Ban Ki Moon to Ottawa to begin to undo the damage.

Promote some senior officials for UN jobs.

Ninth, restore the instruments of Canadian power and influence.

Canadian spending on defence as a percentage of GDP is at its lowest ebb since the 1930s.

Procurement problems abound, from the F35 to supply ships to Arctic icebreakers and beyond.

Development assistance as a percentage of GDP is at the lowest point since measurement began in 1969,

Harper's valuable but one-off maternal and child care initiative notwithstanding.

The British for example spend at three times the rate we do..

Tenth, and not least, respect public servants, including the Foreign Service

and hear, if not necessarily heed, their advice.

Put someone with worldly experience in charge of Canadian diplomacy.

Conclusion

These 10 steps would begin to rescue us from the hole Mr. Baird and the Harper government have dug for us abroad.