

Notes for a Statement by
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**“Canada and the Arab Awakening:
Towards a Sound Canadian Policy Response”**

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Check Against Delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mesdames et Messieurs

Mr. Spears, thank you for the kind introduction.

Martha, thank you for inviting me to this very timely conference

Rima, thank you for your advice on what tack I should take with this exceptional group of participants and such a very engaged audience.

You have asked me to speak this evening on what the Arab Uprising means for Canada and Canadian foreign policy.

And to do so in 12 minutes!

which is pretty close to “mission impossible”.

But, I will give it a try and argue directly and without much nuance for a principled, coherent, consistent, committed over-arching strategy.

Where Do Matters Stand?

Today there is a lot of hand-wringing about what the uprising means, especially the downside risks, e.g.,

The capacity of all revolutions to consume the revolutionaries.

The supplanting of the liberal revolutionaries by more organized, more conservative forces.

The difficulty of reconciling secularism and sectarianism, and the willingness of some to exploit the latter

Economic regression, as nervous capital goes onto the sidelines, if not right out of the countries concerned, and tourism shrinks

the evident power and the less evident intentions of the Muslim Brotherhood.

the power of the Salafists, often backed by Saudi money.

the over-reaching role of the military

the comeback of Al Qaeda:

Al Qaeda in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Syria, Al Qaeda in Yemen,
Al Qaeda in the Maghreb

Plus the plethora of previously little heard of Muslim terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram, etc.

In Syria, internecine war and sectarian violence.

There is so much anxiety, in fact, that we tend to overlook what the Arabs have accomplished.

The kleptocrat Ben Ali is gone.

The autocrat Mubarak is gone.

The despot Gaddafi is gone.

Saleh is gone.

And not too far behind them on the road to oblivion, I fervently hope, will be the butcher of Syria, Assad

“and his clan-based, mafia-like leadership that played on the nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments of ordinary people in order to amass power and wealth and send [his country] on a journey of destruction and violence,”

to quote Rahmi Khoury

A further accomplishment of the uprising is that Al Qaeda’s case has been weakened—the change in Egypt and elsewhere did not come about by terrorism,

History is clearly unfolding and, in my optimistic judgment largely in the right direction,

although as Chou en Lai reportedly said of the success of the French Revolution—

“It is too soon to say.”

Revolutions take time.

So does liberal democracy.

The Japanese experience possibly excepted, the transition from autocracy to democracy has never been quick.

We in the West need to remind ourselves that our own liberal democracies have been hundreds of years in the making,

2015 will be the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta,

It is over 200 years since the American and French revolutions.

Canadian democracy has been developing for over 100 years—and still has flaws.

Autocracy, as one wag said, is about straight roads.

But democracy is about curves, switch-backs, zigzags, detours and even occasional dead-ends.

We need to cut the Arabs some slack.

And we need to take the long view

115 member of the 193 countries of the UN have been classed as democracies by Freedom House*, the US democracy NGO.

Further, while we are right to be wary of Islamism, we should remember that all Islamists are not the same;

* Freedom House was founded in 1941; Wendell Willkie and Eleanor Roosevelt served as its first honorary chairs

That the term covers a considerable spectrum of belief from the merely observant to the fanatical.

We should also be wary of Christianity, which itself covers an equally broad spectrum of beliefs, from social gospel scriptures to mindless intolerance.

At their extremes, neither Islamism, nor Christianity nor Zionism nor any monotheistic faith is generous towards non-believers.

Nor should we confuse stagnation and stability.

We have done that for sixty years,

and it has produced societies susceptible to religious extremism,

as the socially disenfranchised grasp at hope and dignity from whoever seems to promise them.

And we need to recognize, especially in the more powerful western capitals, that in any case we outsiders are not in charge,

and that they cannot control the outcome.

Meddling in what they do not adequately understand can be destructive.

What Should Canada Do?

In these circumstances, and with all of these caveats and exhortations
what should Canada do?

First, we should frame an effective strategy towards the region.

That starts with recognizing how important this region is

to the half-million Canadians of Arab descent,

to the many thousands more Canadians whose livelihoods are
affected by the business done with the region

and to all Canadians whose security is affected by what happens
there,

and whose values do not leave them indifferent to the suffering
they witness daily on their TV and computer screens.

As just one piece of evidence to corroborate the economic significance of
the region to Canada,

Merchandise trade between Canada and the Gulf Cooperation
Council states alone is greater than Canada's merchandise trade with
India.

Second, we should get off the sidelines and get onto the right side of history.

Change was going to come sometime in the Middle East.

It has come now,

and the Harper Government should not sit in judgment of it but embrace it,

We should engage with our Arab friends and partners to help them as they create their futures, rather than wait nervously to see what happens.

And we should stay engaged for the long term—no light switch diplomacy.

While not ignoring the security interests of the Israelis, we should not look at the “Uprising” primarily through that prism.

Hundreds of millions of Arabs are throwing off the dead hands of autocracy, privilege and corruption.

Either we will be remembered for what we did to help them—

or we will be remembered for what we didn't do.

We have, at best, modest influence.

But we are not incapable of helping.

Third, as everything is connected to everything else, the Harper government should develop a coherent, long-term strategy towards the Middle East that re-sets Canada's relations with the countries of the region.

A central goal of that strategy should be to support democratizing impulses and good governance in each country.

Support, not try to direct.

The strategy should be built on principles of universal salience that Canadians espouse, principles that we apply consistently, in whatever the circumstance.

No double standards.

Fourth as part of that coherent strategy, we should retool Canada's approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue,

which has a direct and indirect bearing on Canada's overall standing in the region.

And, third, we should face the Iran and Syrian challenges with a mixture of circumspection and determination.

So we need keep a sense of perspective as the Arabs build their own versions of democracy.

We should not forget that attempts at democracy have failed before, sometimes catastrophically, notably in Nazi Germany and Communist Russia.

But, we need also to remember that democracy has succeeded more than it has failed—

A Canadian strategy should incorporate all the foreign policy instruments-- diplomacy, military, trade and investment, and aid

— as well as perspective and patience.

The job of assisting the Arab peoples towards democracy has scarcely begun.

The West, including Canada, has so far been more about promise than about performance.

At Deauville a year ago, the G8 promised in excess of \$20 billion.

So far, it has delivered few of the goods.

Beyond money, a Canadian strategy should include working with the Canadian business community to encourage business investment in the region.

It would also promote trade, including by encouraging imports into Canada.

Both would help create the jobs and the dignity that are in such short supply for the youth of the Arab world.

A Canadian strategy would also support the development of democratic institutions, including political parties,

provide advice on the writing of constitutions and charters of rights, an area of exceptional Canadian expertise, and

train judges, prosecutors and police.

It would support human rights, especially women's rights, and would invest in education, especially girls' education, and in educational exchanges

A coherent Canadian strategy would also include a military component.

Militarily, in my judgment, the Canadian government acquitted itself well in Libya,

and in doing so reinforced the UN's new norm, the Responsibility to Protect, itself a made-in-Canada idea.

For all the debate about NATO exceeding its UN mandate in Libya, failure to remove Gaddafi would have been a much worse outcome.

Personally, I would have been very comfortable in the Council defending NATO's action.

UN Security Council resolution 1973 authorized member states "to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya..."

Resolution 1973 also authorized member states "to take all necessary measures" to impose a no-fly zone.

Neither Russia nor China nor Gaddafi nor Amr Moussa should have been in any doubt about what would follow.

Nor in my judgment were they.

I think their indignation was feigned, an attempt to drape their support for a murderous Syrian regime in principle.

The fact is they don't care what happens to the Syrian people, so long as their rather narrow conception of their interests is served.

Syria,
with its Alawite government,
Christian and other minorities,
Muslim Brotherhood Sunni opposition
Al Qaeda and other insurgents
and opportunistic Kurdish factions

notoriously presents a much more complex and difficult challenge than Libya did.

The Assad regime,
with Russia's and Iran's backing,
while the US is deeply engulfed in an election campaign,
and with the Euro zone self-destructing
has evidently felt no compulsion to compromise.

But there remains an international obligation to protect civilians.

According to R2P, where a population is suffering serious harm, a large scale loss of life, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure,

and the state in question is unable or unwilling to halt or avert the serious harm,

or is itself perpetrating it,

an international responsibility to protect civilians is created.

A precautionary principle of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine is that intervention is justified when there is a reasonable chance of success and a prospect of doing more good than harm.

It is not clear that that last test can be met yet in Syria.

Nevertheless, in my judgment, military intervention to stop the slaughter there must remain an option if Assad and his military continue to use heavy weapons to slaughter their own people.

The Security Council is blocked by the Russian veto, but military action is not blocked.

In Kosovo, NATO acted without a Security Council mandate.

And it did so legitimately in my view because there was widespread support for action

UN General Assembly Resolution A/66/L.57,

which was passed by 133 in favour, including Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, to 12 against, with 31 abstaining,

suggests that there would be widespread support for some kind of effective intervention.

Canada, the Palestine deadlock and the Arab Awakening

For a new Canadian strategy to be effective, the government's policies will have to be to be coherent.

The Arab Uprising has been fundamentally about rebelling against intolerable domestic conditions in Arab countries,

especially about injustice and indignity and lack of economic prospects.

A similar sense of injustice, indignity and inequity extends as well to the Palestinians.

An effective Canadian strategy, one that delivers dividends in the region and for Canada, will have to take that new reality into account including regarding the Palestinian-Israeli deadlock.

At the UN in September, Foreign Minister Baird renewed Canada's commitment to the founding principles of the United Nations,

including the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples

the maintenance of international law

and the fulfillment of the obligations inherent in the Charter.

He underlined that it is the duty of member states to "pull [those principles] from the printed page,

to breathe life into them,

and to practice them every day."

Mr. Baird stressed that Canada stands for "what is principled and just, regardless of whether it is popular, or convenient, or expedient....

Canada does not just 'go along in order to get along'."

If it does not want to be charged with hypocrisy and double standards, the government will need to approach the issues raised by the Palestine and Israel conflict in the same principled way.

The government will need to reaffirm the fundamentals of Canadian policy,

including maintaining our strong support for Israel's right to exist,

to live in peace and security with its neighbours

and to defend itself within the limits of the law.

We should also make clear our strong support for the establishment of a viable and secure Palestinian state,

whose borders should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps,

and a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.

Further, we should start exercising our judgment on developments and policies again, and let the chips fall where they may.

This means neither supporting Israel right-or-wrong

nor Palestine right-or-wrong,

nor presuming that either Israel or Palestine can do no wrong.

We should be fair-minded and clear-spoken on human rights violations by both sides.

This means giving neither democratic governments nor sentimental underdogs a general dispensation from scrutiny.

History is replete with examples of resistance movements and democracies violating human rights laws and norms.

The excesses of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram,

to say nothing of the “rendition” of Canadians to torture abroad,

were perpetrated by the self-proclaimed world’s greatest democracy.

Loyalty to a friend, even a democratic friend, may be a policy;

it is not a principle.

Third, we should anchor our positions in international law, including international humanitarian law.

At times, our doing so would not be welcomed by one party to the conflict or the other, much less by their respective supporters in Canada.

Nevertheless, the law is a rock on which to stand in the turbulent flow of Middle East politics.

Basing our judgments on the law would also be the surest way to remain “principled and just,” in practice, as well as in rhetoric, to reintroduce fairness to Canadian policy.

At the same time, we should remind ourselves that innocent people on both sides are bearing the brunt of this confrontation;

basic human compassion and empathy should also inform our policy judgments.

Fourth, out of considerations of fairness

and to shield Canadian policy from charges of double standards and hypocrisy,

the government should explain to Canadians why it supports the Netanyahu government reflexively, on this issue.

In particular, it should explain its rationale for condemning as unilateral the Palestinian approach to the UN to achieve recognition as a state,

While it turns a blind eye to Israel's building of settlements,
its transfer of population into occupied territory,
its annexation of East Jerusalem,
and its erection of a security barrier on Palestinian land,
all of which are unilateral-- and illegal.

Ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

Fifth, Canadian governments should never, ever, play domestic political games with this volatile issue.

The public peace in our country is not a gift bestowed on us by a favourable Providence but the product of decades of fair and circumspect policies by successive governments.

Only the foolhardy presume its indestructibility.

Canada, Iran, Israel and the Arab Awakening

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has issued a report that provides considerable circumstantial evidence that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon capability.

In actions reminiscent of the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, some observers are reacting to the report by inserting exclamation points where question marks would be more appropriate, as was the case in the build-up to the US attack on Iraq.

Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapon.

It is not clear whether the Iranians intend now to cross the nuclear weapon threshold,

or rather to position themselves to do so relatively quickly after they might eventually decide to go nuclear.

Either way, the Iranian effort does raise potentially grave, albeit differentiated, issues for the international community, including Canada.

Israeli newspapers (Haaretz, Yedioth Ahronoth , others) have been reporting efforts by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak to muster support among senior ministers for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Minister Barak told CNN November 20 that if the Iranian nuclear program were not stopped in the next months, not years, the growing redundancies in Iranian facilities would render an attack ineffectual.

The sabres are rattling again in Jerusalem, as talk of a strike this fall
loudens

Beyond the dangers that Iran presented to Israel, Barak asserted that a
nuclear-armed Iran would use its nuclear umbrella to intimidate Gulf
countries and to sponsor terror with impunity.

He also warned of Iran's triggering of a Middle East nuclear arms race
involving Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt,

undermining the nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty,

a major Canadian interest.

Meanwhile, the Israeli people and cabinet appear to remain divided on the
wisdom and necessity of an attack on Iran, as apparently are Israeli
officials.

Meir Dagan, the recently retired head of Mossad, Israel's external spy agency, warned that an attack against Iran was "the stupidest idea [he'd] ever heard."

There is little doubt that the US administration's preference is to focus on sanctions to curb Iran's suspected nuclear weapons ambitions.

Assuming that sanctions will not in the near term stop Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons option, nonetheless, the essential question remains:

which is worse,

an Iranian Bomb

or the bombing of Iran?

In the former case, deterrence would be relied on to prevent the bomb's use, as has been, and is being, done regarding the US, Russia, China, the UK, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel,

In the latter case, Iran would be attacked

by Israel or the US or both, or possibly by a coalition including Canada,

to destroy its nuclear program or at least delay its nuclear breakthrough.

An attack on Iran would likely not be the simple affair that the Israeli raid was on a suspected Syrian nuclear facility in the summer of 2007.

It would likely escalate to war.

Unless such an attack were authorized by the UN Security Council,

a distant prospect at best,

and even if it were,

an attack would near certainly

plunge the Middle East into war,

cost the lives of countless innocent,
roil western relations with the Muslim world,
refuel Islamist extremism around the world,
damage the international oil market and boost oil prices,
and weaken the international economy when it is already in a
precarious state.

Such an attack could even derail the Arab Uprising, if consequent fighting enabled Arab leaders to call on protesters to rally round the flag in a moment of national need.

Such an attack, if Canada supported it or participated in it, would put major Canadian strategic interests at risk.

What is Canada's strongly pro-Israel government planning to do?

On Question Period last weekend, when talking of Syria, National Defence Minister Peter Mackay recalled the centrality of the UN Security Council to intervention.

He has also said that the Libya template cannot simply be transposed to the Syrian or Iranian cases.

As regards Iran, he has described the military option as “the least preferable”.

This past week, Foreign Minister Baird, for his part, was clear that Canada would act but less clear about how, saying

“Canada will continue to work with its like-minded allies to take the necessary action for Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

It is not a question of if, but to what extent, we will act in response to this report.”

Prime Minister Harper has repeatedly portrayed Israel as an ally, and the two countries are reported to be working on some sort of mutual defence agreement.

In my judgment, the government should think long and hard about involving itself in any Israeli or American attack on Iran.

The world has not used military force to stop the nuclear programmes of other, existing nuclear states.

The onus is on those who would attack Iran to demonstrate convincingly why it is necessary this time.

Were Canada to support or participate in an unauthorized, preventive[†], attack on Iran, the impact on our standing in the Middle East and beyond would be all too predictable, and negative .

The Canadian government needs to counsel its friends contemplating military action to take into account Churchill's observation that

“the statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given,
he is no longer the master of policy
but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”

[†] Note that under international law there is a difference between pre-emptive attack, which is legal, and preventive attack, which is not. Prevention contemplates action against an enemy that might, one day attack. Pre-emption poses much more rigorous tests regarding the capability and intent of an adversary to do harm, the urgency of the need for self-defence and the absence of effective alternatives to immediate military action.

More broadly, and at the same time, Canada needs to develop a strategy to support the Arab Awakening, one of the most promising developments of our times.

Canada also needs to adopt policies on the Palestine-Israel deadlock that are fair-minded and constructive, and that restore our standing in the Middle East.

Canadians who oppose a preventive attack on Iran

And who want a sound Middle East policy to respond to the Arab

Awakening

should speak up now.

Thank you