



CANADA

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Comité permanent des affaires étrangères et du développement international

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⊕ (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, committee

This is meeting number seven of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It is Wednesday, March 4, 2009.

Today we again meet to consider the report from our steering committee...a little later on. We are continuing our review of key elements of the Canadian foreign policy.

Our witness in the first hour is Paul Heinbecker, former ambassador and permanent representative of Canada to the United Nations. He is currently director of the international relations and communications program at the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

In our second hour, by videoconference, we have, from the University of British Columbia, Professor Michael Byers. He holds the Canada Research Chair in global politics and international law.

Our committee provides time for an opening statement of approximately 10 minutes, and then we go into the first round of questioning.

Mr. Heinbecker, I don't know how many times you've appeared before our committee. I can tell you that every time you're here we appreciate it. And we appreciate your experience, your expertise in our field of study today. We welcome you to our committee.

We apologize for the late start. As I've mentioned, before the meeting today we had a number of tributes to a former Speaker of the House, Gib Parent. I know some of our committee members are still there.

We are aware that you may have to leave a little early. We look forward to your comments.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker (Director, International Relations and Communications Program, Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI)): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Merci.

I'm going to speak very briefly, I hope--for me that's a big challenge--and I have three basic propositions and five or six or seven things Canada can do. So I'll try to speak about those. It might be a little bit provocative but it should at least be quick.

The first proposition is if we believe in ourselves there's a lot we can do in this world. I find it very distressing every time I hear Canada talked about as a middle power, every time we regard ourselves as "little Canada" and ask "what can we do". There's plenty we can do if we believe in ourselves.

The second proposition is the more effective we are in the world, the more we're going to be listened to in Washington and the more we're listened to in Washington, the more effective we are going to be in the world. So an effective, independent foreign policy both serves our purposes more broadly in the world, and it helps us to get along on our bilateral agenda with Washington.

In the course of my career, when I saw Canadian officials and ministers go down to Washington, a number of times, to complain about softwood lumber or phytosanitary standards or talk about an entire agenda of bilateral issues with the Secretary of State, we didn't much engagement. We wouldn't get a frosty reply. We'd get a courteous response but not much engagement. The Secretary of State generally was more interested in the world. If the United States is the pre-eminent power in the world, it's a big job and they need help, and they appreciated a Canadian foreign policy that was effective.

The third thing I would say is to be effective in that wider world, we need to invest in diplomacy. That's one of the things that we haven't been doing, and in fact we've been disinvesting, or de-investing in diplomacy. The budgets have been going down for the foreign

affairs department. There are a lot of strains on the department and at the same time, the diplomatic challenges, as I'll mention in a moment, are getting bigger and bigger.

A few words about Obama the man because I think we don't forget about it but perhaps we don't credit enough just how different a person this guy is. He's the most cosmopolitan president the U.S. has ever elected. With a Kenyan father, a family still in Kenya, His American mother worked for an NGO abroad, spent most of her life working abroad and took him with her, He went to school in Indonesia with Muslim kids, He spent his high school years in Hawaii, which is the multicultural centre of the United States and hardly either the mainland or the mainstream. It produces a different kind of mind. If you want to contrast that with...think for a second of what the alternative was. It was Senator McCain, grandson and son of admirals, went to the naval academy, joined the navy, left the navy and went into the Congress, worked in the Senate foreign relations committee...his whole career was national security. It's a very different mindset than that which Obama brings and I think we really have to get our minds around that.

This is what Obama said about diplomacy and foreign affairs; it's a quote I found that I think is very apt.

If you don't understand other cultures, it is very hard for you to make good foreign policy decisions. Foreign policy is all about judgment. The benefit of my life, of having both lived overseas and travelled overseas is I have a better sense of how people are thinking and what their societies are really like. My knowledge about foreign affairs isn't just what I studied in school. It's not the work I do in the Senate foreign relations committee. It's actually having the knowledge of how ordinary people live in other countries.

You could say the same thing about diplomacy. That is one of the strengths that diplomacy brings. It's a worldliness and it's part of the new world we're going to be living in.

So if the world is really changing, how does the world see the United States? It's no secret that if you look at the various polls, in particular, the Pew series of polls since the year 2000, the single most unmistakable finding is that the U.S. has an enormous deficit in public perceptions around the world. They've interviewed 175,000 people, I believe *KJ please check the number—it is in my lecture to the SPS in January* in 54 countries. This was not a once a year Gallup question.

The US's reputation has suffered everywhere, including in the major industrialized countries where they're blamed for the Iraq war, they're blamed for the way things are going to Afghanistan, they're blamed for the crisis we're in now in finance, they're blamed for climate change, and they're blamed for terrorism and the excesses of the terrorism conflict.

In Turkey, which was one of the United States' most sympathetic and faithful allies, the numbers went down to single digits in those seven years. It's now recovered to 12% support for the United States. The rebound that you're seeing, and it's still not very big but it's there, is coming because of Obama. Obama is changing the way people abroad think of the US. Not surprisingly, the western country at least that was most positive about the United States and Obama, among all of the countries interviewed in an Ipsos Reid poll, was Canada.

So we now have a different situation. Where we used to have an American leader who was reviled in the world, we have now one who's admired, whom everybody wants to see succeed, whom everybody sees as an iconic figure. I invite you to listen to what comedian Bill Maher said:

The rest of the world can go back to being completely jealous of America. Yes, our majority white country just freely elected a Black President, something no other democracy has ever done. Take that, Canada!

Obama is a man of his times and the world hopes for his time, but to paraphrase Bob Dylan, "Those times, they are a-changin'". The era of the single superpower is passing into history. The United States is going to be pre-eminent but not predominant.

Kishore Mahbubani, the eminent Singaporean diplomat and scholar, says the west has been predominant only for the last 200 years; Fareed Zakaria, the Newsweek columnist and CNN host, says it's been the last 300 years. In any case we in the West forget that Asia not being at the centre of international affairs is the exception, not the rule. It's only been since the Industrial Revolution that Europe and the west have predominated.

There's an interesting quotation about the Industrial Revolution in Kishore Mahbubani's recent book that gives you the sense of how much things are changing:

It was called the Industrial Revolution, he said, because for the first time in all of human history standards of living rose at a rate where there were noticeable changes in the life span of a single person, as much as 50% improvement. At current growth rates in Asia, standards of living may rise 100-fold in the course of a life span of a single person.

We're looking at not just a sea change, we're looking at a total transformation, a structural transformation. This is not news to everybody, but it's worth remembering that China, Japan, and India rank second, third, and fourth in the world in purchasing power parity. China and Japan rank first and second in the holdings of U.S. treasuries. The economic power may not be shifting; it may have already shifted.

Russia is back, Africa has been making progress, the Latin Americans are getting to sit at the top tables, and the European Union is still one of the richest places on earth. The takeaway point is this: American dominance will diminish, even with President Obama. America will be pre-eminent but not predominant.

That's why Mrs. Clinton in her confirmation hearing said that:

The clear lesson of the last 20 years is that we must both combat the threats and seize the opportunities of our interdependence, and to be effective in doing so, we must build a world with more partners and fewer adversaries. We cannot solve the problems on our own and the world can't solve them without us.

Then she went on to talk about how important it is to invest in diplomacy.

Even under Secretary Rice there was an enormous increase in resources directed to the State Department. Now under Secretary Clinton there's going to be a further effort made, and I'd like you to contrast that with Canada. Here's why: the U.S. administration believes that the U.S.

needs to invest in the capacity to conduct diplomacy, to provide foreign assistance of the kind the changing international situation requires, for its diplomacy to reach out to the world and to operate effectively along with the military. That sounds very familiar to us in Ottawa. The challenges are near identical, but the response is worth looking at.

⊕ (1545)

...the State Department's budget is growing, [Foreign Affairs Department's] budget is shrinking.

Our aid budgets are more or less static.

What can we do then?

I have five things Canada can do, or six things.

First, we can believe in our ability to make a difference in the world. We are not an inconsequential country..

Second, we can invest in our diplomacy.

Third, we can avoid light switch diplomacy, changing policy with every foreign minister and every government. I don't know how controversial the following point is. We shouldn't change foreign ministers every year. And we shouldn't engage in light-switch diplomacy every time we change a foreign minister. "Light-switch diplomacy" was coined by George Schultz, and it means that you change your policy every time you get a new Secretary of State. Well, we've had that tendency, as well, in Canada.

Fourth, if we're going to get the relationship right with Washington, we have to get the embassy in Washington right. One of the things that we need is for the embassy to re-engage in American foreign policy. If you look at the way the Canadian embassy has conducted itself, in recent years particularly, it's been all bilateral. They really haven't played on the international agenda very much. And in doing that, we're basically disarming ourselves. Because the strongest card we have to play, probably, these days, is Afghanistan. That may also be a controversial assertion in this group, but anyway.

Fifth, if we have a foreign policy that is effective in the world we have to have people in the embassy whose job it is to deal with senior Americans at a foreign policy level--I can tell you, the British do that; the French do that; the Germans do that; the Russians do that; the Chinese do that; the Indians do that. Everybody I can think of tries to do that. Because it's all part of taking your responsibility seriously and taking responsibility for what's going on in the world.

Sixth, I'll throw out a line in case anybody wants to follow up on it. I'm not a fan of the idea of a secretariat in the embassy in which we have federal-provincial representation. I think it

confuses people in Washington about who's who, what they're doing and who they're speaking for.

I won't dwell on what we can do economically.

Seventh, I think we can draw a very important lesson from the G20.

How much time do I have left?

⊕ (1550)

The Chair: You have about--actually, you're three minutes over.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: Three minutes over. Okay. Well, I'll stop and I'll bring this point out in the course of the question period, if you like.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.

We're going to go into the first. And again, I'll just mention this to the committee. Our guest has to leave at a quarter after four today and so, we're very tight on the timelines here.

Another thing is at 4:15, before our teleconference begins, we'll have committee business where we'll have the steering report and deal with that.

So, first round. Mr. Rae...?

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Mr. Heinbecker, good to see you and welcome to the committee.

Maybe I'll just ask a question that may strike you as coming off the wall, but do you think we should merge CIDA and Foreign Affairs?

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: Yes.

Hon. Bob Rae: Why?

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: For two or three reasons.

One is, generally speaking, at the cabinet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has more authority than a minister of CIDA. We've had, for years, CIDA ministers who had a very difficult time getting heard.

This is not about the current government. It's about my experience, going back quite a long way.

I think that CIDA is better off with the part-time attention of a strong foreign minister than the full-time attention of a minister who might not be as strong.

The second thing is I think we've gotten away from the idea that CIDA policy is part of foreign policy. Yes, it's about poverty reduction. Yes, it's about helping people. But it also is how we're seen in the world. It is an instrument of foreign policy and I think it needs to be used as an instrument of foreign policy more than the tendency is now. There is a tendency to try to keep them apart and I think that is probably a mistake.

I'm not a fan, by the way, of the policy of concentration, either, partly for foreign policy reasons. The fewer countries that you have a development assistance relationship with, the weaker your relationship is with everybody else. And that may not seem significant, and I certainly wouldn't suggest that that's the only reason you do it, but, for example, if you want to get elected to the UN Security Council, it is easier if you have relationships with people than if you don't have or if you have cut them off.

So, I know there's a lot of pressure in the international aid community and some from the OECD to focus, but I think there's a foreign policy issue there.

Hon. Bob Rae: Just to follow up with the second thing that you said because a lot of what you said was very interesting. I mean I certainly second your view about the disinvestment and diplomacy. I think it's a big problem.

You said it made a cryptic comment about our influence in Washington and Afghanistan, could you develop that idea? I wasn't quite clear what you were getting at.

⊕ (1555)

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I think it's the obvious point, and it's consistent with what I was saying. If you're carrying out a foreign policy which is effective and if part of that foreign policy is of benefit to the United States, people in Washington are going to react to it. I think that that's what it is. The United States including the Obama administration especially. Now he's talking about more and more forces going into Afghanistan. The review is on in the United States about what they're going to do, but it's already evident that they think more forces are necessary and more diplomacy is necessary and more aid is necessary. They think all of it is necessary.

They've appointed Richard Holbrooke who was my colleague in New York and in Germany when I was Ambassador there to be a special representative. And that is a sign, I think, that they're taking it very seriously. And it also should be a sign to us, I think, that we should perhaps contemplate doing a similar thing. I think we should perhaps appoint our own special envoy .

Another idea we might have is the creation of an eminent persons committee , three or four or five or six really smart experienced people who are familiar with the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan and in central Asia who could be kind of a sounding board to this. And I think a further thing--the French have just appointed a special envoy. If there was a special envoy for all of the major contributors, you could have a contact group of the kind we used to have in Bosnia

and Kosovo which ultimately brought about the end of that fight. So I think that there's a lot to be said for that.

Hon. Bob Rae: Just to follow up on that. I'm sure you didn't know this, but I actually asked this question in the House today on the question of a special envoy.

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I didn't know it.

Hon. Bob Rae: Because I agree with you. But my sense is that there's a mismatch between our military sacrifice and effort which has been extraordinary in Afghanistan and the absence of diplomatic and political leadership. That's my perception. Do you think that's a fair comment?

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I don't think there's any doubt that we have been a lot stronger on the military side than we have been on the diplomatic side and on the aid side. On the aid, we got off to a slow start. I think that we've caught up quite a bit. On diplomacy, it's a little harder to see. I'm not saying that there are not things happening because I don't know everything that's happening either.

But I would subscribe to the idea that we should be doing more on the diplomatic side.

Hon. Bob Rae: I think I'll let it go, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Rae, we'll move to Mr. Crête. Vous avez...

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: I'd like to turn my Blackberry off, but it's brand new and I don't know how to do it.

The Chair: Well, you know what, we will excuse you. If your phone rings, we will excuse you, but we won't excuse anyone else around the table, Mr. Heinbecker.

Mr. Crête.

[*Français*]

M. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Je vous remercie beaucoup de votre témoignage parce que on a adopté une motion, au début, pour dire qu'il fallait qu'on fasse une révision complète de la politique.

M. Paul Heinbecker: Je comprends.

M. Paul Crête: Je pense qu'on essaie, au comité, de compenser pour les changements multiples qu'on a rencontrés, de ministre ou des gouvernements minoritaires qui sont les choix de la population et qu'il faut respecter. Dans ce sens, je pense que votre témoignage pourrait quasiment être le titre de notre rapport final. La raison pour laquelle on fait cette étude complète, c'est pour essayer de développer une politique en dehors de l'approche partisane le plus possible, pour la politique étrangère du Canada à venir.

Dans cette perspective, vous avez dit que l'ambassadeur à Washington devrait jouer un rôle multilatéral, c'est-à-dire être plus présent dans les débats multilatéraux, probablement dans les échanges avec les autres ambassadeurs.

Pouvez-vous nous donner plus de détails sur l'action que vous souhaiteriez de l'ambassadeur et de l'Ambassade dans la perspective particulière d'agir dans d'autres secteurs que dans le bilatéral?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: It is the case. I don't have any inside information on how the embassy-

[*Français*]

M. Paul Crête: Quelle est votre perception, à vous?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: But what I would say is this. In those cases where we have an ambassador who's been able to do foreign policy and bilateral relations, and we've had a few of them, I think our impact has been stronger than in those cases where all we're trying to do is deal with bilateral issues.

It's important for the ambassador to be able to go in to see the assistant secretary of state for the Middle East or the assistant secretary of state or to see Holbrook on Afghanistan or to see Dennis Ross on Iran or maybe, most important of all, Senator Mitchell on the Middle East. You don't get access to those people unless it's done at a very senior level.

My judgment is you need somebody who is sufficiently cognizant of the issues, familiar with the issues that he can go and have that kind of a policy discussion in which he explains what Canada is doing, in which he makes some requests about cooperation, or in which he makes some warnings. That's what you need the ambassador to be doing, as well as going to see a senator about buy America, which is important. I'm not diminishing its importance, it's very important, but I think if you're only playing on one side of that equation, you're diminishing your effectiveness.

🕒 (1600)

[*Français*]

M. Paul Crête: Pour permettre cela, il faut une orientation politique dans ce sens, directement à l'ambassadeur pour lui dire que cet aspect-là est important aussi, ou si c'est plus une question d'initiative personnelle de l'ambassadeur de la façon de faire son travail.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: No, it's pursuant to the policy and it certainly has to reflect the government's wishes. What I'm saying is you need somebody whose modus operandi is broader than just the bilateral relationship. That's been the case.

To go back to a semi-neutral example, back in the 1980s Ambassador Gottlieb, for example, and Ambassador Burney were both very engaged in international questions, but especially Gottlieb was. He was named by the Washingtonian Magazine as one of the 50 most influential people on American foreign policy. He was also known at the time as being the most well known ambassador in town, both from a congressional point of view and from a policy point of view. Frankly, looking back, those were very positive days.

[*Français*]

M. Paul Crête: Dans l'action du Canada aux États-Unis, il y a une certaine mesure à mettre dans l'importance à chaque niveau, par exemple le bureau du président, le Sénat, la Chambre des représentants, les corps diplomatiques, de quelle façon, sous-pèseriez-vous tout cela, donneriez-vous une valeur relative à l'action?

Est-ce important qu'on accroisse de façon significative notre intervention auprès du Sénat et des sénateurs? Vous avez dit qu'il était important de savoir comment pensent les autres. Que devons-nous faire pour savoir si nous parlons aux bonnes personnes? Si nous sommes suffisamment présents, dans quel groupe faut-il être plus présent?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Heinbecker: One of the most difficult things to do in Washington is to be sure you're talking to the right person on an issue because Washington's a very big place.

One of the things I was told when I first came to Washington was that if you don't like American foreign policy, just wait five minutes and you'll get another one. It's like the weather in central Europe. The National Security Council, the White House has a foreign policy, the state department has its vision, the treasury, the defence department, and they're not necessarily coordinated. Then you have the Congress, where every senator is his own secretary of state. It's very difficult to do and you have to be able to deal with all of them. You can't just say, "We're going to deal with the administration". It's not possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Heinbecker.