



Empire's Ally: Canadian Foreign Policy (Greg Albo)

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There has been much gnashing of teeth over Canada's foreign-policy stance since the day Stephen Harper and his Conservative government was elected to office.

Canada's relations with the U.S. on a phalanx of fronts have been at the centre of controversy.

One issue has been the softwood-lumber deal cut by Ambassador Michael Wilson, which limits Canadian lumber exports to the U.S. and allows the Americans to keep \$1 billion in duties ruled by trade tribunals as illegal. This has been judged by the government as a necessary step to re-establishing "good" bilateral relations to secure and deepen economic integration.

A second has been Canada's Middle East policy, in terms of the deployment of Canadian troops into a major combat position in southern Afghanistan, and the uncompromising support for the Israeli and U.S. positions on Israel's summer assaults against Lebanon and Gaza.

American Geo-Political Strategies

It is a striking fact that the end of the Cold War did not lead the U.S. to dismantle its

military empire and regional alliances. Instead, it extended them and added additional overseas military deployments under both the Bush-Republican and Clinton-Democratic administrations. A new American empire had emerged out of the debris of the Cold War system. It is a particular empire of global capital, operating through the hierarchy of the nation-state system dominated by Western capitalist interests, and the economic, military and diplomatic hegemony of the U.S.

It needs to be underlined that the post-September, 2001 geopolitical context intensified rather than transformed the developments that had been evolving over the 1990s. The attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City gave the U. S. state the opportunity to place its post-Cold War objective of

American primacy in the world order in a new set of security doctrines. It also paved the way for the extension of its overseas military capabilities, most importantly over varied contested oil-supply routes in the Middle East and Asia. The new U.S. agenda became enshrined in the September, 2002 U.S. national security statement laying down the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive deterrence.

The recasting of American foreign policy in terms of a globally assertive national interest meant an even greater willingness to act unilaterally than had been the case in the past, when Cold War politics compelled nominal consultation with key allies. This was the basis for the U.S. bullying the UN to support the intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, and the decision to attack Iraq, under specious grounds, without UN approval. It has also meant that the U.S. has become more aggressive in the governance of the world market, as in the scuttling of the Doha Round WTO negotiations. It has been willing to sacrifice the purity of neoliberal doctrines of free markets in pursuit of its own trade interests and currency policy.



Canada, the U.S. and the World Order

All this has posed several key issues for Canada, both its immediate relationship with the U.S. and its place in the world order. This must be understood in the dynamics of global power relations. First, capitalism is a social order in which a basic contradiction resides in the separation of sovereign states alongside the global accumulation of capital that systematically traverses international borders. The relations between states manage this contradiction through particular institutions like the WTO and NATO. For Canada, this is foremost the bilateral relationship with the U.S. maintained through the institutions of NAFTA and the North American security complex. These institutions sustain Canada as a subordinate ally of U.S. imperialism, but with Canada's own imperial interests also being advanced within them.

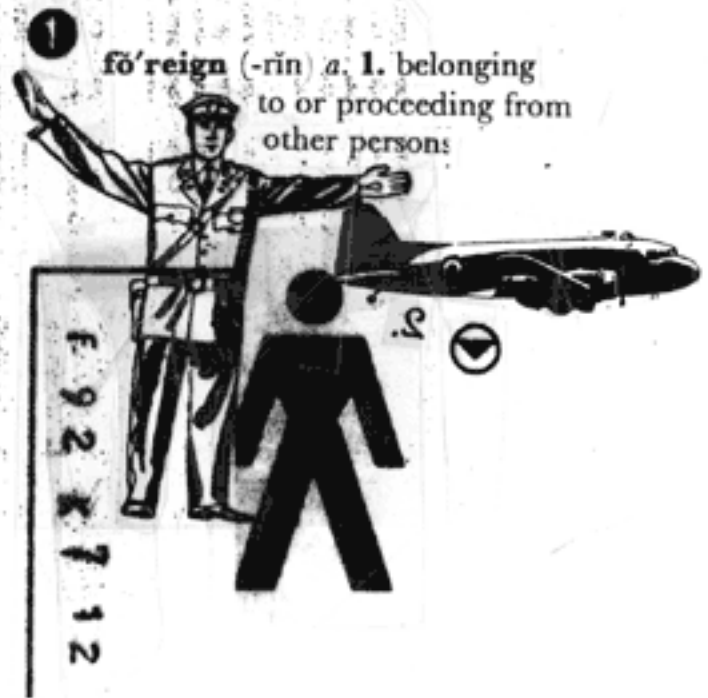
Second, the world market today is characterized by a growing interpenetration of capital across states. New forms of global economic governance and regional trade blocs foster and sustain this process. The preferential trading arrangements of NAFTA, as well as the numerous other trade agreements guiding economic relations across the Americas, are meant to support the internationalization of capital as much as to free cross-border trade.

This has built up material as well as ideological support for projects of “deep integration” among capitalist and state interests in Canada. Canadian foreign-policy positions defend the institutions of NAFTA and these material interests even when NAFTA blatantly fails, as in the case of the continual U.S. usage of countervailing measures against Canadian lumber exports. Indeed, defense of the general economic

interests of Canadian capital, which necessarily includes the American capital invested in Canada and Canadian investments in the U.S., has recast the entire foreign-policy apparatus of the Canadian state.

This raises a third point. To sustain global accumulation, there has been a consistent increase in the relative power of the international and coercive apparatuses of the state. The “economic security” of NAFTA has for business interests become directly linked to “North American security” and thus “imperial security.” This steadily made more untenable the small, independent space for foreign policy that Canada had opened up for itself during the post-war period.

At that time, Canada’s foreign policy projected itself as a middle-level power. This meant working as an ally of the U.S. through multilateral institutions, pushing for cooperative negotiation of security among the capitalist powers and carving out space for particular international positions with Third World countries. An attempt was made to re-invent this orientation in the late 1990s under then foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy, with his “soft power” proposals for human and collective security as the central focus of Canadian foreign policy. But this agenda was dead even as the ideas were being drafted.



Reorienting Canadian Foreign Policy

Since September, 2001 Canada has substantially re-organized its security and international policies. In doing so, the Canadian state has had the support of key economic interests notably the Canadian Council of Chief Executives and all the business think tanks, like the C.D. Howe Research Institute. It fits their common project of deepening integration with the U.S.

First, the immediate response after 9/11 was to develop parallel tracks between a new security agenda to keep pace with U.S. developments and maintaining North American integration. This included: a new Cabinet National Security Committee; budgetary increases for all the agencies involved in policing, anti-terrorism and security work; extension of funds and powers for policing borders and airports, linked to a new Smart Borders Act; new legislative powers in the form of an Anti-Terrorism Act, which widened the definition of terrorism and scope for investigation, allowed for preventive detentions and issuing of security certificates, and extended the range of the Official Secrets Act; and an immediate increase in the military budget, particularly for the JTF2 Special Forces for rapid deployment and to deploy troops to the Gulf and Afghanistan as a direct contribution to the U.S. War on Terror. These measures set in motion wider negotiations between Canada and the U.S. over "Fortress North America."

Second, the architecture of the Canadian state was significantly re-designed so that security and military capacities, over and above increased budgets, were given increased prominence.

The list is sweeping: strengthening the security and defense committees and secretariats in the PMO and Privy Council Office; raising the profile of Canada-U.S. relations in Parliament and giving the Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. cabinet access; a new Public Safety Act (2004) and a New Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, paralleling and coordinating with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; an Integrated Threat Assessment Centre under CSIS; Integrated Border Enforcement Teams and Integrated National Security Teams under the RCMP, coordinating with U.S.

policing agencies; new coordinative relations between CSIS and the CIA; extending the capacities for coordination at the Canada-U.S. border via shared databases, joint screening, limits on “safe third country” provisions for refugees and plans for biometric screening; and extensive interdepartmental cooperation between Canada and the U.S. for all departments having either a security or borders dimension in their mandates.

This reorganization strengthened the role of the security and policing apparatuses in all dimensions of Canadian foreign policy. The Harper government has sought only to tighten these structures administratively, make the PMO the fulcrum for security and foreign-policy decision-making, and to push ahead the Fortress North America agenda, notably adding securing the Arctic to the mix.



Third, a new strategic framework for foreign policy has been evolving. The Chretien government's *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (2004) moved away from Axworthy's human-security agenda, and also took distance from the most vociferous dimensions of the Bush Doctrine. But it also aligned Canada with American security concerns and committed Canada to meeting the new U.S. security requirements. The *International Policy Statement* (2005) released by the Martin government and the NAFTA leaders' *Waco Declaration on a Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America* (2005), however, aligned Canada more strongly with U.S. security and economic concerns. The Harper government has largely left these documents to the side, but Harper has pushed even more strongly in the direction they trace of more closely defining Canadian foreign-policy interests as tied to U.S. security concerns and imperial agendas to ensure Canadian capitalists' access to U.S. markets for their goods and capital.

Finally, the Canadian military has been systematically renovated in its operational capabilities and its flexibility for overseas deployment. Canada has depleted its peacekeeping missions to almost nil, and has become by many tallies the third-largest contributor to the “War on Terror” after the U.S. and Britain. The Chretien budgets had begun to expand military budgets; Martin had in 2005 pledged almost \$13 billion over five years; and the first Harper budget pledged an additional \$5 billion beyond committed defense outlays. This has been for expanding troop levels, their operations in the “field” and new armaments. It is also matched by a shift in Canadian military doctrines toward “networked joint capabilities” and “inter-operability” for “multi-force, multi-country” operations. This essentially means improved capacity to support U.S. military operations in pursuit of its and Canadian imperial ambitions.

Canada and the Middle East

The Middle East has literally been the battleground where Canada’s new foreign policy has been foremost tested (although the western and Canadian intervention against democratic processes in Haiti is just as telling). The previous Liberal government had already begun moving to tie Canada closer to American and Israeli positions. This could be seen in the Martin government’s endorsement of Canadian military deployment for a combat role in southern Afghanistan and its break with the Chretien policy of “peacekeeping” in Kabul. But it could also be seen in the Martin government shifting UN votes following extensive lobbying by Zionist forces in Canada to side with the U.S., Israel and a few other American vassal states regarding Israel’s failure to uphold United Nations resolutions on Palestine and other human-rights issues. In November, 2005, Martin put this before the United Jewish Communities like this: “Israel’s values are Canada’s values.”

Rather than continuing Canada’s historical support for multilateralism and the international rule of law, Canada now openly defended the right of the U.S. and Israel to exercise unilateral military measures, and separated international rules on a host of issues for these two major “rogue” states. At the same time, Canada hypocritically followed the U.S. in holding North Korea, Iran, Venezuela and others to international

rules and norms in pursuing various sanctions and measures against these states.

According to Canada's new foreign-policy position on the Middle East, some states have the right to extra-territorial sovereignty, while other states can exercise their sovereign rights only at the discretion of the major powers.

This is where the Liberals had already moved Canadian foreign policy (through a minority Parliament, with only minimal dissent from the NDP) before their defeat. Harper's Conservatives have taken up these positions still more vigorously, continually invoking all the American clichés of how the world has changed since 9/11. On the fifth anniversary of the atrocity, Harper went so far as to identify it as an attack on Canada, and the various interventions in the Middle East as measures to prevent terrorism in Canada. Indeed, this has become the government's principal justification for the extension of the Canadian mission's mandate in southern Afghanistan. And it was invoked as the reason for the recent, September decision to increase Canadian combat troops and to deploy a new level of arms in the form of additional fighter jets and tanks with long-range firing capacities. The Harper government inherited the Afghanistan mission, but then went on to define it as a centrepiece of its government, partly on its own terms and partly in embrace of the American geopolitical vision.

It has done similarly on other Middle East issues. Harper made Canada the first nation to place sanctions on the newly elected Hamas government in the Palestinian territories. These sanctions became the trigger that began the escalation of hostilities in Gaza and the return of Israeli occupation. Canada has worked closely with the U.S., Britain and Israel to isolate the Palestinians, and to ignore the construction of the apartheid wall, the humanitarian disaster in Gaza and the continued Israeli development of illegal settlements. The Canadian response to Israel's aggressive assaults on both Gaza and Lebanon this summer, in a manner that clearly violated international law regarding collective punishment, was more of the same.

Dissent and Democracy

It is clear that a majority of Canadians are increasingly uncomfortable with Canadian foreign-policy positions. Half the population consistently dissents from Canadian troops

being in Afghanistan. Even higher poll numbers consistently register opposition to American policies more generally. They are rejecting the reckless and morally troubling foreign-policy position that Canada now endorses.

There is a growing contradiction between the desires of the Canadian people for an “independent foreign policy” and the alignment with American imperialist and security objectives. This desire is also at odds with the imperial agenda that has formed in Canadian business and state elites. This has made them one of the Empire’s strongest allies.

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