Empire's Ally: Canadian Foreign Policy
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Since the coming into power of the Stephen Harper Conservative government in January of 2006, there has been much gnashing of teeth over the foreign policy stance of Canada. In particular, Canada's relation with the U.S. on a phalanx of fronts has been at the centre of controversy. One 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 the 2006 assault of Lebanon and continuing siege Gaza by Israel. These stances have been celebrated by the Right, especially the cynics who dominate the national media in defending U.S. policies at every turn, as bringing a new 'ethical realism' to Canadian foreign policies.

Liberal commentators have lamented the break from the approach of the Chretien regime (quietly ignoring the Martin interregnum). Indeed, the Liberal leadership troika of Stephen Dion, Michael Ignatieff and Bob Rae have been in unison with respect to the 'balance' of sending troops to Kabul to defend the new U.S. puppet Karzai regime and the navy into the Arabian Gulf, but not directly participating in the 'coalition of the willing' in the U.S. invasion of Iraq or openly adopting the ballistic missile defence system. For their part, the social Left and the NDP have cursed the drift away from a 'peacekeeping' role for Canada's armed forces (although the NDP initially backed the Conservative Party Parliamentary resolution on the Kandahar mission), and the bypassing of multilateral institutions to support unilateral U.S. policies to remake the global order. The NDP is now taking a position against the Afghan deployment, largely on the basis of an inappropriate mix of development, peacekeeping and military objectives.

While the Chretien government manoeuvrings to allow some Canadian distance from U.S. policies should not be naysayed, none of these views come to grips with the way geopolitical alliances have shifted during the current phase of neoliberalism. Nor do they address the particular role of imperialist ally of the U.S. that Canada has long occupied, and the way Canadian foreign policy has been transformed – particularly with respect to the Middle East – with the changed geo-political context since 2001.

American Geo-Political Strategies

Since the military defeat of the U.S. in Vietnam and the economic turmoil of the1970s, the geo-political context of the world market and North American relations have undergone enormous transformations. Although this can now be seen as a period of the

formation of neoliberal globalization under American hegemony, it has also been marked by different phases, contradictions and rivalries in the world order and inter-state relations. The early 1980s, for instance, were dominated by the 'second cold war' military build-ups in the old U.S.S.R. and the U.S., and the rising trade and competitive capacities of Europe and East Asia. The emergence of the neoliberal policy framework in the late 1970s was a means to reassert U.S. primacy in the world order and address questions of American economic decline.

The cold war division began to shred at the end of the 1980s, as the Soviet bloc collapsed and China made an explicit turn toward capitalism. The construction of a new system of regional alliances and international policy developments – notably the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), East Asia trade and production networks encompassing China, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) – gained momentum through the 1990s. These alliances both responded to and fostered the internationalization of capital. The relations of cooperation and competitiveness between the advanced capitalist countries became redefined, as did the relations between the dominant countries of the centre and the dominated countries in the peripheries of the world. As these processes of 'globalization' moved to the centre of political debate and government calculation, neoliberal policies became widespread as few states and their ruling classes dared break from the world market and the 'Washington consensus' pushing economic liberalization.

It is a striking fact of this phase of neoliberalism that the end of the cold war did not lead the U.S. to dismantle its military empire and regional alliances. Indeed, it extended them and added additional overseas military deployments under both the Bush-Republican and Clinton-Democratic administrations. It became common across the political spectrum to speak of a 'new imperialism' (with the political Right in both the U.S. and Canada actively endorsing the project), given U.S. assertiveness over global security and economic issues in a unipolar world of a single global superpower. Universally, inter-state relations in the world order became defined, in the first instance, by particular relations to the global hegemon. This was the case even in the context of deep historical and geographical relations apart from American state interests. 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 geo-political 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 (although in practice it has been one of preventive intervention without any serious possibility of imminent attack of the U.S. to pursue American imperial strategies). This doctrine

claimed the right for the U.S. to act on its own apart from sanction from multilateral institutions, namely the United Nations (UN) Security Council (that it in any case dominated), or concerns for cooperative security as negotiated with its NATO allies.

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 publicly stated 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.

Even with the Republican defeat in the November 2006 congressional elections, with its indirect rejection of the American intervention in Iraq, it is necessary to be quite sceptical that this will mean a turn in American primacy objectives as they have evolved over the last decades. The bipartisan Iraq Study Group under the leadership of James Baker, former central advisor to the earlier Bush presidency, was essentially an effort to retain the primacy strategy. It would reposition the American intervention in Iraq in a way that would allow engagement with a wider set of states in the region, that neoconservative dogmas blocked. This would shift some balances of power in the region, but not deliver a fatal blow to American positions. These are themes that have continued into the Presidential campaigns of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

It needs to be underlined that both Iran and Syria want to normalize their relations with the global capitalist order and not at all to withdraw from it. The ruling classes in these states would be quite happy to have greater freedom to pursue neoliberal strategies with the support of the international economic agencies. Even the continuance of the chaos in Iraq, or a messy withdrawal, would only initially signal a specific defeat for American strategy in the Middle East region. The American position in the greater Middle East would still likely be ahead of where it was pre-1990s in terms of alliances and military bases; such a defeat would not mean a recasting of the overall objectives of the American primacy strategy or its operational modalities (and both American parties are initiative will forward proposals to re-establish this on other fronts); and the European Union and China are still far away from being able to offer any alternative (capitalist) world order to the American one (the ruling blocs in these zones remain quite interdependent with the U.S., although they are competitive rivals for market shares).

Canada, the U.S. and the World Order

The U.S. remaking of inter-state relations over the period of neoliberalism has posed several key issues for Canada, in both its immediate relationship with the U.S. and place in the world order. This must first be understood not in the details of the policy shifts that have taken place in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, but in the dynamics of global power relations. First, capitalism is a social order in which a basic

contradiction resides in the institutional separation of territorially-based sovereign states and the global accumulation of capital that systematically traverses international borders. The geopolitical relations between states manage this contradiction, and maintain the hierarchy between them in particular institutions such as the WTO or 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 under neoliberalism has been characterized by asymmetries in trading relations and an explosion of financial capital. This has meant a growing interpenetration of capital across states. New forms of global economic governance and regional trade blocs foster and sustain these economic processes. 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' amongst 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 in the face of NAFTA dispute settlement rulings. Indeed, defence 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, foreign policy, as well as the defence and security arms of the state, increasingly become drawn into defending economic and geo-political interests. Indeed, the period of neoliberalism has seen a consistent increase in the relative power of the international and coercive apparatuses of the state in support of capitalist market interests domestically and internationally. The 'economic security' of NAFTA for business interests has become directly linked to 'North American security' and thus 'imperial security'. This has steadily made more untenable the small independent space for foreign policy that Canada had opened up for itself during the postwar 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 amongst the capitalist powers, and carving out space for particular international positions with third world countries (although the last was hopelessly both imperial and cooperative in nature).

An attempt was made to re-invent this orientation in the late 1990s under then External Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy and 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. Neoliberalism and the American empire swept aside any such attempts at embedding ethical norms in international relations and expanding autonomy in foreign policy positions. The signing of the initial Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. in 1989 had effectively already killed this orientation on a bilateral basis.

Reorienting Canadian Foreign Policy

Since September 2001 Canada has substantially re-organized its security and international policies to support the new geo-political context established by the U.S. 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 – in doing so. 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 defence 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 co-ordinating with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; an Integrated Threat Assessment Centre under CSIS; under the RCMP, Integrated Border Enforcement Teams and Integrated National Security Teams, 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 data-bases, joint screening, 'safe third country' provisions sending refugees back to the U.S. if that is the first country they reached, and plans for biometric screening; and extensive interdepartmental co-operation between Canada and U.S. for all departments having either a security or borders dimension in their mandates. This reorganization of the state 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 leader's Waco Declaration on a *Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America* (2005), however, more strongly aligned Canada with U.S. security and economic concerns. The Harper government has largely left these documents to the side, but he has pushed even more strongly in the direction they point 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 pledged in 2005 almost $13 billion over five years; and the first Harper budget of 2006 pledged an additional $5 billion beyond committed defence outlays, and real expenditure increases followed the next year as well. The 2008 budget went further, and proposed a 'Canada First Defence Strategy', and raised the defence budget for 2008-09 to $18.8 billion. This included an automatic annual defence spending escalator guaranteeing an increase in the defence budget of 2 per cent. This is to say that the defence budget will increase by a guaranteed 2 per cent every year. This is estimated to add an additional $12 billion to the defence budget over 20 years, and increase Canadian military expenditures to some of the highest levels since the second world war. Canada now ranks sixth among NATO countries in terms of military spending.

These expenditures have also 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. The increasing role of the Canadian military in southern Afghanistan – and the general belligerence of Canada over the last months on the need for wider NATO mobilization in the war effort against traditional docile Canadian stances on NATO – is a key symbol of the shift of Canadian military agendas.

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). Canada has long toed British and then American positions on the Middle East, notably as part of the majority opinion of the 1947 eleven member United Nations Special Committee on Palestine that argued for partition into Jewish and Arab states. Canada adopted some very minor measures in support of Middle East democracy and Palestinian rights over the 1990s. This was the

so-called ‘balance’ of Canada’s position. But the previous Liberal government of Paul Martin had already started to tie Canada closer to American policies in the region and Israeli positions. This could be seen in the Martin government endorsing Canadian military deployment into a combat role in southern Afghanistan, and breaking with the Chretien policy of ‘peacekeeping’ in Kabul. But it could also be seen in the Martin government shifting UN General Assembly votes, after extensive lobbying by Zionist forces in Canada, to side with the U.S., Israel and a few other American vassal states in resolutions before the United Nations on Israel’s failure to uphold United Nations resolutions on Palestine and other human rights issues. The most revealing was the July 2004 Canadian abstention on a General Assembly resolution calling for Israel to abide by the International Court of Justice ruling on the illegality of Israel’s apartheid wall barrier in the West Bank. In November 2005, Martin put this before the United Jewish Communities as “Israel's values are Canada's values.”

These were symbolically significant shifts, acknowledging the break with what had been the precepts of Canadian international stances. Rather than continuing with Canada’s historical support for multilateralism and international rule of law, Canada now openly defended the right to exercise unilateral military measures for the U.S. and Israel, and also separate international rules on a host of issues for the two major ‘rogue’ states from the rules and laws binding others. (At the same time, Canada has hypocritically followed the U.S. in claiming only to want to hold 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 (and through the minority Parliament had received only minimal dissent from the NDP) before their defeat. Harper’s Conservatives have taken these positions up even more vigorously than the previous Liberals, 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 term it 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 mandate in southern Afghanistan. And it was also invoked as the reason for the September 2006 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. Additional calls by Canadian generals (and virtually the entire military-industrial establishment in Canada) for increasing Canadian troop levels and weapons purchases have continued, including through the redeployment of Canadian troops to Kandahar province in a combat position and the extension of the mission to 2012. The Harper government inherited the Afghanistan mission but they have defined it as a centre-piece of their government, partly on its own terms and partly in embracing the American geo-political vision.

A similar realignment of Canadian foreign policy under Harper can be seen with respect to policies on Israel and Palestine. Canada had only begrudgingly recognized the right of

the Palestinian peoples to self-determination. Even after supporting United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza, Canada only diplomatically expressed concern for a 'just settlement', particularly with reference to refugees. Through the 1980s, Canada avoided referring to a Palestinian state, preferring to speak only of a Palestinian 'entity' or 'homeland'. The first intifidah forced Canada to acknowledge the Palestinian right to self-determination, and with the Oslo Accord to allow that a Palestinian state might result from negotiations. It was only with UN Security Council Resolution 1397 of 2002 that outlined a 'two-state solution' that Canada came to recognize Palestinian statehood, although continuing to define Israel as a religious-ethnic Jewish state. It is these embarrassingly small steps toward recognition of the rights of the Palestinian peoples that the Martin and then Harper governments have had Canada back off from. Harper has more consistently aligned Canada's UN votes on Palestinian rights in line with the three key dissenters – Israel, the U.S. and Australia. These have included abstaining on UN resolutions on the Palestinian right to self-determination, Israel assenting to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Israel not exploiting the natural resources of the Occupied Territories. The Harper government has, moreover, retreated in its diplomatic language on Palestinian statehood, preferring now only to speak of Palestinian 'aspirations' within the region.

The policy realignment is also evidenced by the Canadian government's relation to the Palestinian Authority. In 2006, Harper made Canada the first nation to place sanctions on the newly elected Hamas government in the Palestinian territories. This included ending direct aid to the Palestinian Authority (in practice, some projects have ended, some restructured, and some channelled through multilateral organizations), ending support by Canadian government departments to the PA and a review of all partnership projects, and limiting contact of Canadian officials with Palestinian counterparts. Canadian aid to Palestine is tiny (about 1 percent of aid donated, one of the least generous of major donors), but the sanctions added to the pressures leading to the escalation of hostilities in the Gaza, and the return of Israeli occupation. Canada has subsequently worked closely with the U.S., Britain and Israel to isolate Hamas in Gaza, while attempting to work with the West Bank centred emergency Fatah government, effectively splitting the Palestinian Authority. As part of this effort to divide Palestinians, Canada has restored its assistance to the West Bank authority. In doing so, Canada continues to ignore the construction of the apartheid wall, the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, and the continued Israeli development of illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Finally, the Canadian government response to Israel's aggressive assaults on both Gaza and Lebanon in summer 2006 indicated the openly partisan embrace of American and Israeli positions. Israel's interventions in Lebanon clearly violated international law in the 'collective punishment', wholesale destruction of civilian infrastructure and killing of innocents. Israel's actions faced the condemnation of world opinion, and the vast majority of states of the world. But Harper lined up Canada with the U.S. at the July 2006 G8 meetings in defence of the Israeli bombardments. Indeed, Harper became – and has remained – the most vociferous defender of the 'proportionality' of the ferocious Israeli attacks terming them a 'measured response'. Even after Canadian civilians were killed by Israeli bombardments, Harper refused to condemn Israel for the large number of

civilian casualties and continued to defend its use of force, including the blanket aerial bombings. (Then Liberal leadership contender and now deputy leader, Michael Ignatieff, went even further in defending Israel's actions defending Israel's bombing of civilian buildings as part of a ' kind of dirty war you're in when you have to do this and I'm not losing any sleep about that'.) Indeed, at the September 2006 Francophonie meetings Harper vetoed a resolution deploring the impact of the war on Lebanese civilians. Not surprisingly, Canada was absent from the list of donors struck at the end of the conflict to rebuild Lebanon, and has remained a very minor aid donor. In Canada's foreign policy under Harper, there appear to be no legal or moral limits of acceptable international conduct being able to be breeched in the case of Israel.

Dissent and Democracy

It is clear that a majority of Canadians are increasingly uncomfortable with Canadian foreign policy positions. Half of the population consistently dissents from Canadian troops being in Afghanistan. This is even with the national media keeping critical voices of the Canadian intervention marginal. And even higher poll numbers time and again register opposition to American policies more generally. They are rejecting the reckless and morally troubling foreign policy position that Canada now endorses: closer integration into U.S. foreign policy positions, including the doctrine of the right of the U.S. and Israel alone to use military 'pre-emptive intervention', apart from any sanction by the UN Security Council; uncritical alignment with U.S. and Israeli military interventions, including more active Canadian military deployments; and political and bureaucratic disregard for Canadians who might get in the way of these foreign policy positions, whether this is Canadians stranded in Lebanon, Canadians illegally extradited in the U.S. 'war on terror' sweep, or Canadians arrested and detained on feeble charges of terrorism in Canada..

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 openly imperialist agenda that has formed in Canadian capitalist and state elites. This has made Canada one of the Empire's strongest allies. The new Canadian imperialist agenda can be seen in the work of the North American Competitiveness Council, where leading North American capitalists and political elites have been strategizing on furthering the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America; and in the October 2006 report of the influential Parliamentary Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence calling for Canada to join the U.S. ballistic missile defence programme and closer military and economic integration to secure North American interests around the world. The political orientation of Canadian foreign policy and the ruling classes have parted with any popular efficacy of democracy in Canada.

Popular social forces in Canada do not face this alone. It is a reflection of a deeper antagonism of the current world order. The U.S. objectives of re-establishing its global primacy and unilateral authority contradicts the liberal promises of a world order based on a community of equal sovereign nations governed by international legal and policy

norms. The Bush doctrine and the imperial interventions across the Middle East, supported by Canada and the other Western powers, is the most visible symbol of this geo-political strategy. One of capitalism's most powerful fictions is – not for the first time – being laid bare for what it is: naked self-interest.

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