



Kim Richard Nossal, “The Liberal Past in the Conservative Present: Internationalism in the Harper Era,” in Heather A. Smith and Claire Turenne Sjolander, eds., *Canada in the World: Internationalism in Contemporary Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–35 (page turns indicated thus: [22])

Internationalism has been a central element of Canadian foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. It features prominently in explanations of the policies pursued in the decades immediately following the war (Keating, 2002; Chapnick, 2005). Indeed, so deeply entrenched did the internationalist approach to foreign policy become in Canada that it could readily be described as a **dominant idea** (Nossal, Roussel and Paquin, 2011: 135–41), a dominance widely acknowledged, even among those who are critical of the idea. (See, for example, Smith, chapter 12; Turenne Sjolander, chapter 14; Smith, 2003).

But perhaps because of that entrenched dominance, internationalism has come to be featured equally prominently in normative debates over the direction of Canadian foreign policy (Munton 2002-3). In the late 1970s, Sandra Gwyn bemoaned the decline and fall of “Canada’s Golden Age of Internationalism,” asking “Where are you, Mike Pearson, now that we need you?” (quoted in Chapnick, 2008-09: 210). In the late 1980s, scholars like Cranford Pratt wondered aloud whether it was possible for Canada to embrace a “refurbished humane middle power internationalism” (1990: 155). In the 1990s and early 2000s, a persistent line of criticism of the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien was that it was abandoning Canada’s traditional commitment to internationalist policies (Rioux and Hay, 1998–9; Nossal, 1998–9; Cohen, 2003).

Likewise, a common theme in commentary on the foreign policy of the Conservative government of Stephen Harper has been the expression of regret over what is often termed the “abandonment” of internationalism by that government after 2006. The view that the Harper Conservatives have abandoned Canada’s traditional **Pearsonian internationalism** is shared by commentators across an extraordinarily wide spectrum of opinion. For example, in her 2007 screed on Canada’s putative contribution to the American empire, *Holding the Bully’s Coat*, Linda McQuaig (2007: 1) asserted that “we’ve moved from being a nation that has championed internationalism, the United Nations and UN peacekeeping to being a key prop to an aggressive U.S. administration operating outside the constraints of international law.” McQuaig’s extreme and vituperative antipathy towards the [22] Harper Conservatives is clearly not widely shared in Canada—at least judging by the millions of votes cast for Conservative candidates in the 2006, 2008 and 2011 elections—but her observation that Canada no longer champions internationalism as

it once did is echoed by a range of more serious and substantial foreign-policy commentators (Fowler, 2010; Fréchette, 2010; Welsh, 2010; Siddiqui, 2010; Heinbecker, 2010; Paris, 2011: 26–28).

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the degree to which the Conservative government under Stephen Harper has abandoned traditional internationalism in its foreign policy. Assessing Conservative foreign policy initiatives using some commonly accepted characteristics of an internationalist approach to global politics. I conclude that we have indeed seen little evidence of the internationalism that was the dominant idea in both the discourse and the practice of Canadian foreign policy in the decades after the end of the Second World War. We have not even seen what has been called **internationalism lite**, the favoured approach of the Chrétien Liberal government (Nossal, Roussel and Paquin, 2011: 143; also see Keating, 2006). Rather, we have seen the articulation of a set of ideas rarely articulated openly in Canadian foreign policy: a Manichæan view of the world (Paris, 2011).

Following the May 2011 election that gave the Conservatives a majority, the prime minister outlined his views of foreign policy. In an interview with *Maclean's*, Harper asserted that Canadian foreign policy had to be made for a “dangerous world” that was marked by “a struggle between good and bad”; in such a dangerous environment, “the real defining moments for the country and for the world are those big conflicts where everything’s at stake and where you take a side and show you can contribute to the right side” (Whyte, 2011). Thus, he told a Conservative Party convention, his government would take “strong, principled positions in our dealings with other nations”; the purpose was not “just to go along to go along and get along with everyone else’s agenda. It is no longer to please every dictator with a vote at the United Nations” (Harper, 2011).

But it can be argued that there is another “idea” that is driving contemporary Canadian foreign policy: the idea that the primary purpose of international policy is to advance a domestic partisan agenda. In other words, since 2006 foreign policy has had an important strategic purpose, and that has been to advance Harper’s broader overall goal of remaking Canadian politics by making the Conservatives the dominant political party in Canada. That Harper is seeking to effect a long-term transformation of Canadian politics is clear. As he himself admitted unambiguously in September 2008,

My long-term goal is to make Conservatives the natural governing party of the country. And I’m a realist. You do that two ways. . . . One thing you do is you pull conservatives, to pull the party, to the centre of the political spectrum. But what you also have to do, if you’re really serious about making transformations, is you have to pull the centre of the political spectrum toward conservatism. (Quoted in Behiels, 2010: 118)

[23]In the 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2011 elections, we can see slow but steady progress towards this long-term goal. Although the explanation for the ascendancy of the Conservatives and the decline of the Liberals between 2004 and 2011 is to be found in factors other than international policy, in this chapter I argue that foreign policy has played a not unimportant part in this transformation. As I will show, the Conservatives used international policy unambiguously to advance the broader political goal of displacing the Liberals as Canada’s natural governing party, in particular through a concerted effort to break with a past in Canadian foreign policy that is seen as deeply Liberal.

How Internationalist Have the Harper Conservatives Been?

One way to assess whether the Conservative government under Stephen Harper has abandoned internationalism is to examine the main characteristics of the internationalist approach to Canadian foreign policy and then to look at the main elements of the foreign policy of the Harper Conservatives and see whether we see internationalist ideas reflected in policy behaviour.

But what is internationalism? As the editors note in the introduction, this volume does not strive for a common definition of internationalism. In this chapter, I suggest that there are five characteristics of this approach—often qualified as “liberal internationalism” to underscore the overtly liberal values and assumptions that underlie it. First, internationalism puts a premium on the idea of each state taking *responsibility for playing* a constructive role in the management of conflicts that will inevitably arise in global politics. Second, an internationalist policy suggests that *multilateralism* is essential for defusing conflicts in international affairs, and that therefore states should not act unilaterally in international politics. Third, internationalism places emphasis on involvement with, and support for, *international institutions*, for it is believed that institutionalization promotes multilateralism and dampens the unilateral impulse. Fourth, support for international institutions must be given concrete expression by a willingness to use national resources for the system as a whole. Finally, internationalism suggests an emphasis on international law, which is assumed to enhance the stability of the international system (Nossal, Roussel and Paquin, 2011: 135–41; also see Keating, 2002; Munton, 2002–3).

If we look at the Canadian government’s foreign policy in the years immediately following the Second World War (Holmes, 1979, 1982; Chapnick, 2005), we can clearly see that these ideas animated Canadian foreign policy. Moreover, as Erika Simpson (1999) reminds us, these ideas are evident in the approaches of Lester B. Pearson, Canada’s foreign minister from 1948 to 1957. To what extent do we see these ideas reflected in the foreign policy of the Harper Conservatives?

We must preface this discussion by noting that when the Conservatives came to power in 2006, they demonstrated no serious acquaintance with international affairs. The international policy mindset of the party is perhaps [24]most clearly revealed in the party’s 46-page 2006 election platform. This document contained just three short sections on international affairs: defence, trade, and foreign policy writ large, the latter section consisting of a mere 171 words (Conservative Party of Canada, 2006: 44–45), so short that it is possible to quote it in full:

Canadians are rightly proud of our values of freedom, fairness, and compassion. But too often, Liberal foreign policy has compromised democratic principles to appease dictators, sometimes for the sake of narrow business interests. Foreign aid has been used for political purposes, not to ensure genuine development. We need to ensure that Canada’s foreign policy reflects true Canadian values and advances Canada’s national interests.

A Conservative government will:

- Articulate Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, free markets, and free trade – and compassion for the less fortunate – on the international stage.
- Advance Canada's interests through foreign aid, while at the same time holding those agencies involved in this area accountable for its distribution and results.
- Increase spending on Overseas Development Assistance beyond the currently projected level and move towards the OECD average level.
- Make Parliament responsible for exercising oversight over the conduct of Canadian foreign policy and the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations.
- Place international treaties before Parliament for ratification.

Indeed, it would appear that those who crafted—or approved—this section of the 2006 platform had little knowledge or understanding of the nature of international politics or foreign policy. Tellingly, none of the many eyes in the Conservative Party who looked at the platform before it went to press appeared to know (or care) that “foreign aid” is a term that is decades out of fashion, or that ODA is the acronym for “official development assistance,” not “overseas development assistance.” In addition, the partisan frame of the platform that focused on the supposed single sin of Liberal foreign policy—having “compromised democratic principles to appease dictators, sometimes for the sake of narrow business interests”—reveals a highly limited understanding of what foreign policy is (or should be) all about.

Certainly there was little evidence in 2006 that the leaders of the Conservative Party of Canada had inherited any of the strong internationalist principles of the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney from 1984 to 1993 (Michaud and Nossal, 2001; Gecelovsky and Keating, 2001). On the contrary: the 2006 platform—and the superficial level of Conservative discourse during the 2005–6 election campaign—underscored Jeffrey Simpson's observation that Harper came to power “with no experience or apparent interest in the world,” and that his party [25] was “without a single frontbencher qualified by experience or interest to become foreign affairs minister” (2006).

To be sure, that was then. Once in power, the Harper cabinet was confronted with the necessity of dealing with a wide-ranging international agenda, and the prime minister himself had to accommodate his schedule to the crowded annual calendar of summit meetings. Moreover, “Canada's New Government” was supported by the massive bureaucratic resources of the Canadian state. In the event, Harper and his government obviously left the jejune simplicities of the 2006 platform behind them. But the platform is a useful reminder of the degree to which the Conservatives arrived in power with a *tabula rasa* when it came to international politics and foreign policy.

Once the Conservatives were in power, the mission in Afghanistan became the central foreign policy preoccupation of the Harper government, so much so that Louise Fréchette, former Canadian ambassador to the UN, former deputy minister of national defence, and former deputy UN secretary-general, openly worried that “we come across as a ‘one-note’ foreign policy country—Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Afghanistan” (2010: 273). But in fact the Canadian contribution to Afghanistan mission could be considered an excellent example of contemporary internationalism. The mission is authorized by the United Nations and the Afghanistan Compact of 2006, which was intended to provide an overarching plan for Afghanistan, was an international agreement involving over 50 countries, including all permanent members of the Security Council. The Canadian contribution to the Afghanistan mission

could be constructed as being in the best traditions of Pearsonian internationalism; after all, as Adam Chapnick reminds us, Pearson's internationalism was "far more violent, aggressive and confrontational" than the usual portrait of Pearsonian internationalism widely peddled to Canadians by their elites in the last forty years (2006: 64). Indeed, when Harper visited Afghanistan at the outset of his mandate in March 2006, his speech committing Canada to the mission even if the going got tough—"Canadians do not cut and run"—sounded what could be interpreted as an internationalist note. Harper claimed that the Afghanistan mission was "in the very best of the Canadian tradition: providing leadership on global issues; stepping up to the plate; doing good when good is required" (Harper, 2006).

But it is clear from the justifications Harper offered for the mission that internationalism cannot be identified as the driver of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Rather than try to justify the mission in internationalist terms, the prime minister offered a largely incoherent mishmash of different justifications. He began with the standard "national interest" argument that Canadian security depended on ensuring that Afghanistan did not again become an incubator for terrorist attacks. But he also suggested that Canadian security was affected by the opium trade, which, he said, "wreaks its own destruction on the streets of our country." And he also invoked three other justifications: the importance of a country such as Canada taking a leadership role in global politics, the importance of the humanitarian mission, and the importance of "standing up for Canadian values" (Harper, 2006). [26] These latter justifications were, in a sense, internationalist (Chapnick, 2006: 65), but when juxtaposed with the others, they did not make much sense. It should be noted, however, that Harper's incoherence in 2006 was not unusual. After studying every speech on Afghanistan given by Canadian ministers from 2001 to 2008, Jean-Christophe Boucher concluded that "the Canadian government's message on Afghanistan has been chaotic for most of the past seven years," with the result that the government "has not succeeded in clearly communicating the logic behind Canada's intervention and actions in Afghanistan" (Boucher, 2009: 718). Boucher's conclusion echoes Robert Fowler's acidic critique that the Afghanistan mission is marked by a "confusion of purpose" (2008: 5).

Moreover, whatever initial enthusiasm Harper had for the mission eventually dissipated. In early 2008, he negotiated a deal with the Liberal opposition to remove Afghanistan from the political agenda by committing Canadian forces to withdraw by 2011—again, a move without any strategic coherence or logic (Nossal, 2009). Likewise, Harper's steadfast commitment to complete military withdrawal by 2011, despite the "surge" embraced by the administration of Barack Obama (Turenne Sjolander, 2010), remained puzzlingly inconsistent with his earlier commitments (Nossal, 2011). Moreover, the last-minute reversal in the face of strong allied pressure in November 2010 underscored the continuing lack of strategic logic of Canada's Afghanistan policy (Nossal, 2010a). In their special report marking the fifth anniversary of the Conservative victory, Paul Wells and John Geddes (2011: 22) noted the irony: "Harper's handling of the Afghanistan file reflected a level of incoherence he would not have accepted from a subordinate."

A second priority of the Harper Conservatives has been the Arctic, and here we see an interesting transformation. The Harper government began by following a well-trodden road of Canadian unilateralism that goes back to the articulation of such fanciful notions as the "sector theory" of Canadian claims over Arctic waters in the early twentieth century. The Conservatives played the **Arctic card** from the beginning during the 2005-6 election campaign (Nossal, 2007). Once in power, the Harper

government was aggressively unilateral in asserting Arctic ownership, getting into a spat with Denmark over Hans Island, and adopting what is usually called a “use it or lose it” approach (Huebert, 2009; Byers, 2009). For this reason, the government was keen to expand the presence of the Canadian state in the Arctic in order to bolster Canadian claims there. To that end, the Conservative government embraced an expansive program of hardware acquisitions, including the creation of a deep-water replenishment facility from an existing port at Nanisivik to extend a Canadian presence in the Arctic during the June-October navigation season; the acquisition of a Polar-class icebreaker; new replenishment ships for the navy; and a replacement for the Aurora CF-140 long-range patrol aircraft. Some of these expensive initiatives have moved ahead, albeit slowly. In August 2008, Harper announced the construction of a heavy Polar class icebreaker to replace the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent*, due to be decommissioned in 2017. Symbolically named the CCGS *John G. Diefenbaker*, after the Progressive [27]Conservative prime minister who succeeded St. Laurent as prime minister in 1957, the Polar-class icebreaker is intended to operate for three seasons of the year. Construction at Nanisivik began in 2010, but was significantly downgraded in 2012 as a budget-cutting measure.

In August 2010, however, the government released a statement on what it called “Canada’s Arctic foreign policy” (Canada, n.d.). The policy embraced a distinctly multilateral approach to northern policy, focused on a revitalization of Canada’s commitment the Arctic Council and a recognition that the eight states of the circumpolar north “remain best placed to exercise leadership in the management of the region.” It should be noted, however, that the nascent internationalism in the new policy came with an edge. The statement concluded by leaving an iron-fisted reminder in the velvet multilateral glove: “Cooperation, diplomacy and respect for international law have always been Canada’s preferred approach in the Arctic. At the same time, we will never waver in our commitment to protect our North.”

By contrast, the Harper Conservatives have taken other international policy positions that would not be mistaken for Pearsonian internationalism. Prime among these would be the evolving Canadian position on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. In opposition, Harper understood that Canada’s commitment to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emission to six per cent below 1990 levels was a number that Jean Chrétien had essentially pulled out of thin air at the Kyoto negotiations in 1997. After all, given that Canada’s population is *structurally* designed through immigration policy to grow at a massive rate annually, no government of Canada could maintain greenhouse gas emissions at a steady state, much less reduce them, and certainly not to a figure of 6 per cent below 1990 levels (Simpson, Jaccard and Rivers, 2007). Thus, between 1997 and 2006, when the Conservatives took office, Canada’s GHG levels steadily grew, even as the Chrétien government was ratifying the protocol in 2002.

In power, however, the Conservatives somewhat moderated their approach to the Kyoto Protocol. The Harper government announced that while Canada would not meet its Kyoto targets, it would not renounce the Kyoto agreement. At the same time, however, Ottawa started to engage in what Heather A. Smith has called “cowboy diplomacy” in global climate change negotiations, which she characterized as “regime dismantling” rather than the regime creation usually associated with internationalism (2008–9: 58, 63). For example, in September 2007, Harper announced that Canada would join the Asia-Pacific Partnership (APP) on Clean Development and Climate, a multilateral group formed in 2005 by Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, and the United States. Ostensibly designed to be a complement to Kyoto, this grouping included states that had not ratified Kyoto—Australia and the United States—but also parties to

the Kyoto Protocol that were very heavy emitters, such as India and China. However, as Smith (2009) notes, the APP as a multilateral institution was not particularly effective at reducing GHG emissions, and it was effectively sidelined with the defeat of John Howard in the November 2007 elections in Australia and the victory of Barack Obama in the 2008 [28]presidential elections in the United States. Moreover, the Conservatives eventually began to play the very same numbers game that they had criticized the Chrétien government for playing. At first, the Harper government adopted what it called a “made-in-Canada, made-for-Canada” approach: the so-called 20/20 target introduced in 2007 sought to reduce Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions to 20 per cent below 2006 levels by 2020 (Baird, 2007). In 2010, the Conservatives simply moved Canada’s target in line with that established by the Obama administration: 17 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020.

More generally, we cannot see unambiguous evidence that the Harper government feels warmly about the full panoply of international institutions whose meetings he must attend by virtue of his position. By all accounts, he has little enthusiasm for the United Nations as an institution (Fréchette, 2010; Heinbecker, 2010), tending to focus on the corruption, ineffectiveness, and blatant Israel-bashing that is so deeply rooted in that international organization. And even when Harper eventually decided to seek a seat on the Security Council in 2010, his “campaign” was limited to a speech, delivered to the General Assembly in September 2010, that paid appropriate (and unusual) tribute to the long tradition of support for UN by Canadian governments since the 1940s (Harper, 2010b); he did not make the personal calls that usually are a mark of a Security Council campaign. Indeed, it can be argued that Harper’s real views were better reflected in his initial inclination to avoid vying for the seat. But even after he had agreed to seek election, Harper was unlikely to have shared the kind of breathless enthusiasm of Paul Dewar, the foreign affairs critic of the New Democratic Party, who claimed that “[w]e must have a seat on the Security Council, it’s in our DNA” (quoted in Slater and Ibbitson, 2010).

Canada’s failure to secure election to the Security Council in 2010 can in part be attributable to the lack of the kind of “grand” initiatives that were taken by previous governments, held up (however inappropriately) as exemplars of Pearsonian internationalism, and used to bolster the decennial Canadian bid for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. These would include initiatives taken by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien in the 1990s (such as the landmines treaty, the International Criminal Court, or the New Partnership for African Development launched at Kananaskis in 2002); by the Mulroney government from 1984 to 1993 (such as its anti-apartheid activism or global environmental initiatives); or by the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau from 1968 to 1984 (such as his nuclear suffocation initiative, his co-chairmanship with Mexico of the North–South summit at Cancún in 1981, or the peace initiative of 1983–4).

To date, the most significant global initiative undertaken by the Conservative government has been the global maternal health initiative (see Carrier and Tiessen, chapter 11), launched in January 2010 by Harper in his role as host of the G8 summit (Harper, 2010a). However, this initiative was immediately mired in controversy when it was revealed that the Canadian initiative explicitly excluded family planning and abortion services. To be sure, within two days Harper had abandoned the family planning exclusion, but because the remaining abortion [29]exclusion lined the Conservative government up with Republicans in the United States, the Democratic Obama administration criticized Harper’s initiative. At a meeting of G8 foreign ministers, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the US secretary of state, was blunt: “You

cannot have maternal health without reproductive health.... And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortion" (quoted in Clark, 2010). David Miliband, the British foreign secretary, also publicly criticized the Canadian government for its stand on abortion. Harper tried to defend his government's position, arguing, "We want to make sure our funds are used to save the lives of women and children and are used on the many, many things that are available to us that frankly do not divide the Canadian population" (Fitzpatrick and Foot, 2010), but the exclusion was to be widely criticized in Canada and elsewhere (Webster, 2010).

In a hunt for evidence of whether internationalist ideas animate the Conservative government, it should be noted that there does exist one speech given by Harper in which he sounds if not Pearsonian, then at least Holmesian. Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in September 2007, Harper explicitly promised that his government would pursue middle-power diplomacy. As he put it, middle powers "step up to the plate to do their part ... willing to assume responsibilities, seek practical, do-able solutions to problems and who have a voice and influence in global affairs because they lead, not by lecturing, but by example" (Harper, 2007), a clear echo of the kind of perspective on "middlepowermanship" in Canadian foreign policy articulated by John W. Holmes (1970, 1976, 1984; also Nossal, 2010b). But, as far as can be determined, this is the only time that Harper used the term "middle power" in his speeches to describe Canada in world affairs; he certainly did not return to this theme in the years after 2007.

Letting Go of the Past: The Abandonment of Liberal Internationalism?

To this point I have sought to find evidence of internationalist ideas in the foreign policy rhetoric and practices of the Harper Conservative government. I have suggested that while there is clear evidence of multilateral engagement, one would be hard-pressed to argue that internationalism has been a guiding idea in the foreign policy realm in Ottawa after February 2006. But why has this dominant idea been so absent in contemporary foreign policy rhetoric or practice?

In assessing this question, it is important to note that no other foreign policy idea has emerged as dominant. The Harper government is clearly not moved by isolationism or continentalism or regionalism as those ideas have manifested themselves in Canadian foreign policy; there is no evident "new" foreign policy idea in formation. It cannot even be concluded that the Conservative government is particularly *conservative* in its foreign policy (Bloomfield and Nossal, forthcoming). And because there is no clear alternative strategic foreign policy perspective articulated or pursued by the Conservative government beyond its embrace of **[30]Manichaeism**, a logical explanation for the absence of internationalism since 2006 is that internationalist discourse and internationalist projects were quietly but purposely laid to rest for partisan political reasons.

In other words, when the Conservatives came to power in February 2006, they brought with them a determination to make a clear and unambiguous break with the past. This was most symbolically reflected in the decision to call themselves "Canada's New Government." Indeed, there is considerable evidence that, in foreign policy, the Conservatives sought policies that would distinguish themselves from their predecessors and encourage Canadians to let go of the past. Most obviously, Harper broke with a long tradition in international policy dating back to 1968, when Pierre Elliott Trudeau, on

assuming office, had ordered a review of foreign and defence policy. This practice had been subsequently followed by Joe Clark, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin (Nossal, 2006). But to underscore the difference from Martin, who, in his brief time in office, had done little more in the realm of foreign policy than produce an international policy review, the Conservative government pointedly did not initiate a review. Even language that served as reminders of the Liberal era—such as Responsibility to Protect, human security, child soldiers, or international humanitarian law—was excised from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade website; political staffers in both the minister's office and in the Prime Minister's Office made clear that certain words were no longer welcome in official documents (Davis, 2009; Collins, 2009; Berthiaume, 2011). Indeed, Canada's leading role in the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention in Libya in 2011 provides a useful exemplar of this dynamic at work. Government statements about Libya were carefully crafted so that Canadians would not be reminded of the last time that the Royal Canadian Air Force engaged in a humanitarian intervention—the air campaign against Serbia from March to June 1999 during the Chrétien government.

If this rebranding dynamic was at work in foreign policy, then certainly internationalism—so commonly rendered in Canadian discourse as “Pearsonian internationalism”—would have been a likely target. For internationalism as a policy idea cannot be understood unless it is placed within its historical context. This idea did not spring out of nowhere; rather, it was a response to the dominance of the particular Canadian brand of isolationism during the interwar period from 1919 to 1939. Isolationism as a policy idea had stressed the acceptability—if not the necessity—of avoiding any involvement in the conflicts of global politics; it had legitimized the pursuit of unilateralism; it had attached little importance to international institutions like the League of Nations, except for the prestige that simple membership could bring, but it was quite acceptable to avoid making any concrete national contributions to international organizations; and finally it held out little hope for the ability of international law to contribute anything positive to world politics. A view common in Ottawa was that isolationism during the interwar period had contributed to the collapse of the international system into systemic war [31] in the late 1930s. In this view, in order to avoid a repetition of this catastrophe, it was necessary that all countries, but particularly the great powers, avoid the policy idea that had contributed to the Second World War. In that sense, internationalism must be seen as the antithesis of interwar isolationism.

Internationalism may have started life as a way of thinking about the world of world politics, and, applied in the Canadian context, a way of thinking about the most appropriate policies for Canada, as a small power aligned with, and allied to the United States, Britain and other western European countries, to engage that world. However, as these tenets of internationalism were practiced by Canadian foreign policy makers in the decade immediately after the Second World War, and as they became increasingly entrenched in Canadian foreign policy behaviour in the 1960s and 1970s, internationalism as a policy idea underwent an important change. As Don Munton (2002–3) has noted, political leaders in Ottawa increasingly began to recognize that their pursuit of an internationalist foreign policy resonated well among Canadian voters, who appeared to like the self-image of an engaged and responsible middle power contributing to international peace and stability through such activities as peacekeeping and “helpful fixing” (Ichikawa, 1979).

Slowly, what had started out as an approach to foreign policy pursued for essentially foreign policy goals was transformed into a foreign policy pursued for essentially domestic political/electoral

goals. By the late 1990s, internationalism had been turned into what Hector Mackenzie has called the “central myth” of Canadian foreign policy (2007: 90–1). Girded by facile tropes about the tenets of internationalism being “in our DNA” (quoted in Nossal, Roussel and Paquin, 2011: 38), internationalism increasingly became a means to forge a distinct Canadian identity, even if, as Stéphane Roussel and Chantal Robichaud (2004) remind us, this argument must be carefully nuanced.

Chapnick argues that there is a strong link between the mythologized view that Canadians have of Pearsonian internationalism and the political party that was in power for so much of the period after 1945: “Over the last forty years opportunistic Liberal governments have taken ownership of this popular view of liberal internationalism, leading Canadians to believe that Liberal foreign policy stands for contributing positively to world affairs” (2006: 64). Thus, if indeed the Conservatives came to power in 2006 believing that *liberal* internationalism had become *Liberal* internationalism in the popular imaginary, then it is likely that internationalism was subjected to the same rebranding dynamic. In other words, as part of the effort to purge popular perceptions, there was a purposeful abandonment of approaches to policy that smacked of the Liberal era, such as Pearsonian internationalism.

Conclusion

If foreign policy under the Harper Conservatives is interpreted as an outgrowth of an essential *domestic* political/electoral agenda, it makes the apparent disappearance of Canada’s internationalism more understandable. If indeed liberal [32]internationalism is seen by the prime minister and his senior ministers as a tradition in Canadian foreign policy that is deeply associated with Liberal governments—or even with the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney (Gecelovsky and Keating, 2001)—then abandoning overt reminders of those traditions becomes an integral part of encouraging Canadians to embrace the Conservative Party.

But if indeed foreign policy has been used primarily for electoral purposes by the Conservative government after 2006, the possibility of recovering that internationalist tradition—a hope expressed in a number of the chapters that follow—is increasingly unlikely. To be sure, such hopes reflect a wider dynamic. On the one hand, the Conservatives’ embrace of an explicitly Manichaeian worldview, the articulation of a more muscular foreign policy, and the abandonment of the traditional tenets of internationalism has not attracted wide endorsement among the foreign policy elite. On the other hand, however, the new directions in Canadian foreign policy have not inspired the kind of negative reactions among the broader public that might otherwise prompt the Conservative government to change its mind about those directions. And this is likely to be a self-reproducing dynamic: the more that the public accepts (or, as importantly, does not reject) the new ideas about Canada’s proper role in world affairs articulated by the Conservatives, the less relevant that reminders of a Liberal (if not liberal) internationalist past in Canadian foreign policy will become.

Key Terms

Arctic card
dominant idea
internationalism lite

Manichaeism
Pearsonian internationalism

Study Questions

1. Looking at the Canadian case, can one establish a relationship between ideas about the nature of world politics and policy outcomes?
2. In what ways did the internationalist approach after the Second World War get transformed in the 1990s, and why?
3. Can the worldview of the Conservative government of Stephen Harper be described as ideological?
4. Why did Pearsonian internationalism become so entrenched as what Hector Mackenzie terms of a “central myth” in Canadian foreign policy?
5. How was the Arctic card played by Prime Minister Harper’s predecessors, John Diefenbaker, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and Brian Mulroney.

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