

Canadian Foreign Policy

Project Members: [Andrew Schrumm](#), [Andrew Thompson](#), [Daniel Schwanen](#), and [Paul Heinbecker](#)

Canadian policy makers must address many serious challenges on the world stage in the post-9/11 era. Canada is no different than other countries in that it is presented with a multitude of transnational threats and opportunities.

The unique Canadian environment is characterized by the presence of a powerful neighbour, internal divisiveness, a declining international influence, and the need to balance the strengths of natural resources with a lack of hard power in a world defined both by processes of globalization and the continued weight of geopolitical calculations.

It is essential for Canada to have a coherent, well articulated, and skillfully crafted vision of its international role. A multi-dimensional approach to the shaping of foreign policy is increasingly salient given the number of players, issues, and timelines to which policy-makers must pay attention.

As a Canadian research centre on international issues, CIGI is in a pivotal position to bring context and cohesion to the debates surrounding Canada's foreign and security policies. CIGI's research on Canada's international agenda and activities seeks to promote discussion, problem-solving and innovative policy solutions. These objectives are carried out through the sponsoring and hosting of conferences, seminars and workshops and the production of presentations, working papers and books.

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Missing in Action: What Happened to Canada's Foreign Policy?

[Roland Paris](#) | October 31, 2013

In July 2011, shortly after Canadian voters handed the Conservatives a majority government, Prime Minister Stephen Harper [observed](#) that “since becoming prime minister...the thing that’s probably struck me the most in terms of my previous expectations—I don’t even know what my expectations were—is not just how important foreign affairs/foreign relations is, but in fact that it’s become almost everything.”

Given this interesting admission, you might expect foreign policy to feature prominently in the government’s agenda. But you would be wrong. While Mr. Harper may *acknowledge* the importance of foreign policy, the recent [Speech from the Throne](#) suggests that he is still not *treating* it as important.

Yes, the Throne Speech. It seems more like months—and not just two weeks—since parliamentarians returned to Ottawa. Mr. Harper, himself, helped to turn attention away from the speech by showing up the next day in Brussels to announce the Canada-EU Comprehensive Trade and Economic Agreement. The CETA story, however, lasted only a day or so. It was soon overshadowed by the Senate expense scandal that has dominated the news ever since.

Nevertheless, the Throne Speech offers the best glimpse of the government’s policy intentions for the new session of Parliament. It provides a framework for ministers and their officials to follow in the months to come. Ministers typically press for their own priorities to be included in the address, and departmental officials use specific language in the Throne Speech to portray their respective proposals as central to the government’s agenda (and, thus, deserving of priority treatment by other departments and central agencies).

If you think about the speech in those terms—as a broad agenda, a reflection of which ministers succeeded in pushing their priority items into the speech, and a means by which departments can subsequently associate their own issues with specific language in the speech—one thing that stands out is the near-absence of foreign policy in the text. It included almost nothing for the foreign minister or his department to use as a hook for policy.

True, the speech highlighted international trade, including the CETA. However, with the exception of a promise to launch a new plan “to assist Canadian businesses as they expand abroad,” this portion of the speech essentially reported on Canada’s ongoing trade negotiations and offered little that was new.

The main foreign affairs portion of the speech, near the end of the address, was very thin gruel. It began with a paragraph on the moral rectitude and steadfastness of Canada as an international actor:

Canada stands for what is right and good in the world. This is the true character of Canadians—honourable in our dealings, faithful to our commitments, loyal to our friends. Confident partners, courageous warriors and compassionate neighbours.

Fanfare complete, the speech then turned to the first specific foreign policy item. Quiz yourself: which issue warranted top billing? Was it the need to improve Canada's relations with the U.S. (a perennial priority for Ottawa)? Was it a pledge to work with other countries to strengthen the global system of rules and institutions during a period of rapid change and turbulence? Or was it a promise to address the issue that Canadians (and the citizens of many other countries) [regard](#) as the single greatest threat: global climate change?

No, it was none of these things. It was this:

Our Government defends Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, the lone outpost of freedom and democracy in a dangerous region. And our Government stands opposed to those regimes that threaten their neighbours, slaughter their citizens, and imperil freedom. These regimes must ultimately be judged not by their words, but by their actions.

There was nothing new in this statement; it recapitulated language that the government has used many times before. While I agree that Canada must remain a strong supporter of Israel, what message did it send about Canada's foreign policy priorities to list this as the *first* issue? At best, the message was this: We have no new ideas on foreign policy.

The next paragraph reiterated Canada's support for "freedom"—including freedom of religion, a subject of particular interest to core Conservative supporters:

Canada seeks a world where freedom—including freedom of religion, the rule of law, democracy and human dignity are respected. Our Government will continue to promote these fundamental values around the world, including through the newly established Office of Religious Freedom.

Again, there was nothing new in this paragraph. It simply reminded Canadians that the Harper government has been working to promote certain rights abroad – albeit, with [questionable consistency](#).

Next, the speech offered a pair of points on development assistance:

Our Government will help the world's neediest by partnering with the private sector to create economic growth in the developing world.

Tax dollars spent on foreign aid must achieve real results. Our Government's international aid will continue to be focused, effective and accountable.

These statements reflected the government's ongoing efforts to promote private-public partnerships for development. It has done so, in part, through pilot projects with Canadian

extractive companies operating overseas. Once again, there was nothing new in this statement—or, for that matter, in the idea that aid must achieve “real results.”

Finally, we learned that Canada has been promoting the health of women, infants and children in the world’s poorest countries—true and laudable, but yet another statement of what the government is already doing. The only hint of a forward-looking agenda was a pledge to ensure that “early and forced marriage...does not occur on our soil,” which is technically a matter of domestic policy (“on our soil”) but could conceivably also include international efforts.

And with that, the foreign policy portion of the Throne Speech was over. In an address of more than 7,000 words, which took a full hour to deliver, there were just a few short paragraphs on foreign affairs, saying essentially nothing new or substantive. Apart from its ambitious trade agenda, which is finally beginning to pay dividends with the CETA, Canada’s foreign policy has been reduced to an idiosyncratic handful of narrow issues.

There are two possible explanations for the virtual absence of foreign policy from the Throne Speech. On one hand, the foreign minister may have tried, but failed, to convince the prime minister and his staff to include more substantive foreign policy items in the speech. Alternatively, the minister may not have even tried to get such items included.

Either way, the result was the same: a Throne Speech that underscored, once again, how little the Conservative government appears to care about foreign policy. It also suggested that Mr. Harper’s discovery of “how important foreign affairs/foreign relations is” and “that it’s become almost everything” was more of a passing thought than a transformative insight.

TAGS: [Canadian foreign policy](#), [Harper](#)

<http://opencanada.org/features/blogs/roundtable/missing-in-action-what-happened-to-canadas-foreign-policy/>

Tories' new foreign-affairs vision shifts focus to 'economic diplomacy'

[JOHN IBBITSON](#)

OTTAWA — The Globe and Mail, Wednesday, Nov. 27 2013, 6:00 AM EST

Stephen Harper's Conservative government will make "economic diplomacy" in service of private industry the centrepiece of this country's foreign policy, marking a historic shift in Canada's approach to the world.

In a major report to be released Wednesday, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is instructed to "entrench the concept of 'economic diplomacy' as the driving force behind the Government of Canada's activities through its international diplomatic network.

"... All diplomatic assets of the Government of Canada will be marshalled on behalf of the private sector" to fulfill an ambitious agenda of opening new markets to Canadian goods and services, declares the Global Markets Action Plan, the equivalent of a foreign-policy white paper. A copy of the report has been obtained by The Globe and Mail.

The new orientation is the result of a direct order that Prime Minister Stephen Harper gave Ed Fast when he was appointed Minister of International Trade after the 2011 election, according to a government official who spoke on background. The Prime Minister wants trade to become the dominant focus of Canada's foreign policy, and Mr. Fast was to come up with the blueprint for making that happen. The Global Markets Action Plan is that blueprint.

The plan was stiffly resisted by many senior officials within the department itself, according to a government official speaking on background. Calling the new directive "a culture shift" for Foreign Affairs, the official said the action plan sends a message to Canada's diplomats: "Take off your tweed jacket, buy a business suit and land us a deal."

The Conservative government has previously signalled its interest in tying foreign policy and trade. Earlier this year, the government eliminated the Canadian International Development Agency and merged its functions into a new Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. It has also said it would integrate commercial and foreign-policy considerations with international development efforts that have traditionally focused more exclusively on poverty reduction.

The market-first approach to foreign policy will offer fresh ammunition for critics – not least among them former prime minister Joe Clark – who allege the Harper government has adopted a ham-fisted approach to foreign affairs that neglects engagement in collective security and foreign aid through multilateral forums such as the United Nations in favour of simplistic nostrums and a single-minded obsession with trade.

But the plan already has the support of figures such as former Liberal foreign minister John Manley, head of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives; Catherine Swift, who

chairs the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Perrin Beatty, head of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Jayson Myers, president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. All of them served on an advisory panel that helped draw up the action plan.

The plan targets three sets of countries. The first includes emerging markets where Canada could make broad gains, because of rapid growth in the market and a natural fit between what the country needs and what Canada sells. Such countries include China, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Russia and Turkey, among others.

The second set consists of emerging markets with specific opportunities for Canadian businesses, such as Mongolia, Uruguay, Ghana and Kazakhstan, while the third consists of developed economies.

The document points out that Canada will be the only G8 nation with preferential access to both the European Union and the United States, once the proposed free-trade agreement with the EU is ratified.

The new strategy will “ensure that all of the Government of Canada’s diplomatic assets are harnessed to support the pursuit of commercial success by Canadian companies and investors,” says Mr. Fast, in the text of a speech to be delivered to the Economic Club of Canada in Ottawa Wednesday morning.

The new strategy places a heavy emphasis on improving emerging-market access to small and medium-sized companies, known as SMEs. The goal is to increase the number of Canadian SMEs that sell into emerging markets from 11,000 to 21,000 by 2018.

To reach that goal, the government will pursue new trade agreements, foreign-investment protection agreements, taxation agreements, air transportation agreements and science and technology agreements. A core mandate of Canadian diplomats and other officials will be to “open doors, generate leads and resolve problems” for SMEs and other Canadian businesses, according to the action plan.

As well as initialling the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with the European Union last month, the government is heavily involved in the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks, which would include Canada and 11 other nations, as well as in bilateral talks with Japan, India, Thailand and South Korea, among others, although final agreements have proved difficult to reach.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/tories-new-foreign-affairs-vision-shifts-focus-to-economic-diplomacy/article15624653/>

NATO official questioning Canada's commitment

[JANE TABER](#)

HALIFAX — The Globe and Mail, Sunday, Nov. 24 2013, 9:23 PM EST

Canada's commitment to NATO is being questioned by the military alliance, says its deputy secretary-general Alexander Vershbow, who suggests Canada is backing away. During a panel discussion this weekend at the Halifax International Security Forum, Mr. Vershbow said there is "a perception that Canada is de-emphasizing NATO a little bit in its broader security policies."

Mr. Vershbow, who is visiting federal officials in Ottawa Monday, said in a later interview that he doesn't want to "sound overly alarmist" with his remarks, but is "reflecting the chatter in the corridors of NATO headquarters."

Canada, he says, has withdrawn from two key NATO programs – the Airborne Warning and Control System and Alliance Ground Surveillance program.

In addition, there is the issue of Afghanistan post-2014. Canada is to end its military presence there in March.

"We have seen the Canadian decision, at least up until now, not to commit any forces to the post-2014 mission in Afghanistan," he said. "And while we understand that Canada may have borne more of the burden than other allies in the actual combat phase, it's raising questions."

Mr. Vershbow's comments come as Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird expressed skepticism Sunday with the deal between Iran and six world powers to curb the Iranian nuclear program, despite it being supported by strong allies Britain and the United States. In addition, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has distanced himself from the United Nations and recently boycotted the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Sri Lanka over human-rights issues.

Instead, Mr. Vershbow said Canada is setting key priorities in North America, including a much more focused strategy toward the Arctic, closer collaboration with the U.S. through NORAD and co-operation with the U.S. in the Pacific.

Canadian National Defence Minister Rob Nicholson dismissed the view that Canada is less committed to NATO. "I don't know what would be the basis of that," he said at the closing news conference. "Canada does more than its share," he said. "Canada has been a strong supporter of NATO and will continue to be."

NATO plans a summit in September to consider its future. General Jean-Paul Paloméros, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, told The Globe that the biggest threat facing the alliance is the "massive reduction in defence budgets" of its members.

Liam Fox, a British MP and former secretary of state for defence, told the conference that 21 of 28 NATO countries this year would spend more of their GDP on “debt-interest repayments than defence.”

“This is what it is to have debt as a strategic issue,” he said. “We have to understand that our economic policy and our long-term security are interlinked.”

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/nato-officials-questioning-canadas-commitment/article15580910/>